Dump Terry McAuliffe THE EDITORS

THE NEW REPUBLIC

Is Wisdom Possible?
SUSAN SONTAG

Are Journalists Stupid?
JONATHAN CHAIT

MARCH 19, 2001

In Defense Of Conventional Wisdom

By Franklin Foer

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts

WASHINGTON, D.C.
MARCH 19, 2001
ISSUE 4,496

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THE NEW REPUBLIC, Vol. 224, Number 12, Issue 4,496, March 19, 2001. (Printed in the United States on March 7, 2001.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated January 1 & 8, April 9 & 16, July 9 & 16, August 27 & September 3, 2001 and December 31, 2001 & January 7, 2002) at 1220 19th Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036. Telephone (202) 331-7494. For advertising inquiries, please contact Ann Rossaki at (202) 331-7494 or our NY sales office at (212) 924-8700. Yearly subscriptions, $59.94; foreign, $99.94 (U.S. funds); Canada, $79.94 (U.S. funds). Back issues, $4.00 (includes postage & handling). **© 2001 by The New Republic, Inc.** **(ISSN 0028-6583). Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Rights and permissions: fax (202) 331-0275. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, CD-ROM, issue, and article copies are available through University Microfilms Intnl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone 1-800-521-0600. Postmaster: Send changes of address to The New Republic, P.O. Box 37298, Boone, IA 50037-0298. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope (e-mail address: tnr@aol.com). For subscription inquiries or problems call 1-800-827-1289 or visit our website at www.thenewrepublic.com.**

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CORRESPONDENCE

Grading Houston

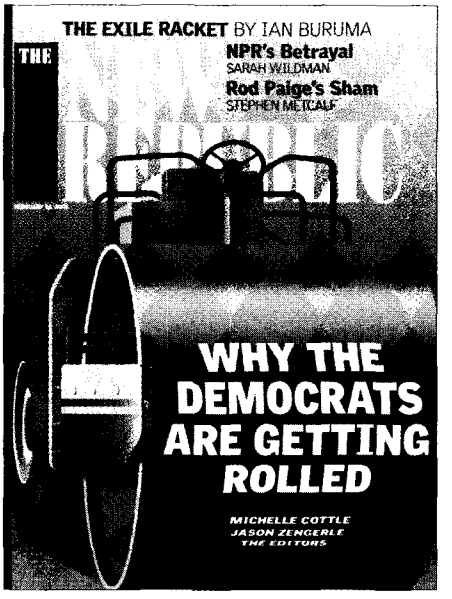
TO THE EDITORS:

Stephen Metcalf's article ("Numbers Racket," February 12) suffers from a serious lack of credibility with regard to the outrageous charges leveled against Community Education Partners (CEP). Metcalf does little more than rehash a series of factually inaccurate, unfounded allegations initially published in our local tabloid, *The Houston Press*. These charges were made predominantly by former management employees who left the company due to job-performance issues. All of the allegations contained in Metcalf's article have been repeatedly investigated by the Houston media and have been found to have no basis in fact.

CEP is a company that contracts with the Houston Independent School District to educate students who have committed acts of violence or who are so disruptive that they deprive other children of the opportunity to learn. These children would normally have been expelled to the streets under Texas law. At CEP they have an opportunity to remain in school and to improve both their behavior and their academic skills. It is the last chance for most of them. While no educational program can be expected to be successful with all of these students, the teachers routinely report that there is an improvement in both their behavior and their academic performance when they return to their home school from CEP.

CEP is a union company. The Houston Federation of Teachers serves as the bargaining agent. We have union staff on the CEP campuses constantly. Our members at CEP call to complain if the schools don't have toilet paper in the rest rooms. Not one member has complained about grade irregularities. What are the odds that they would *all* have ignored illegal or unethical behavior?

I was interviewed by Metcalf while he was researching this story. It was obvious throughout the interview that he did not want to hear anything positive about this program. I suggested that he might want to visit the campuses. Had he done so, he would have seen children learning in an orderly environment. He apparently preferred to write a negative story about a program he has never visited and to quote sources who, for the most part, lacked the courage to allow their names to be used with their quotes. By doing so, Metcalf did a disservice to the public, to the students at CEP, and to our union members, who care deeply for the children attending the CEP schools and who work very hard



daily to turn around the most difficult students in the Houston schools.

As a union president, I have always been and will continue to be a strong advocate of the First Amendment. However, freedom of the press carries with it a responsibility for truth. Metcalf has abdicated that responsibility.

GAYLE FALLON
President
Houston Federation of Teachers
Houston, Texas

TO THE EDITORS:

Stephen Metcalf wrote a critical article about Community Education Partners in Houston, even though he never visited one of our schools and did not talk to any of the students who have been helped by this program. Nor did he bother to interview Houston teachers who state that the program has enabled them to teach with fewer disruptions and that the students returning from the CEP program are better prepared to learn and follow the rules.

When we offered Metcalf testing data on more than 1,000 students who showed improvement in reading and math, he showed no interest. A free weekly Houston paper first made the charges he makes in his article. Every one of these charges was refuted by the school district and ignored by the mainstream media when the issues were thoroughly examined. Metcalf is certainly free to have his own opinion about our program, though THE NEW REPUBLIC's readers should know that his sources have already been discredited.

RANDLE RICHARDSON
CEO
Community Education Partners
Nashville, Tennessee

STEPHEN METCALF REPLIES:

As I made clear to Randle Richardson during our 90-minute conversation, I was willing to speak to anyone he suggested regarding the scandals plaguing Community Education Partners (and did so). Rather than showing "no interest," I urged him to send me anything he considered relevant to my story. Richardson never provided me with the names of "students who have been helped" by CEP, nor the names of their parents, nor the names of any teachers in the program. (One student who had been hyped by the company in the local media as its star success story called the program "bullshit"—which speaks to the quality of the local media's scrutiny.) Furthermore, I repeatedly thanked Richardson for more than 100 pages of information the company sent me. At no time did he or anyone at CEP include data on the 1,000 students he mentions, even though I had made clear that I would be reporting the findings of two independent analysts: namely, that CEP students are not making anything near the gains the company claims they are.

When I spoke to Gayle Fallon, it became clear who her constituency is: not troubled students but the teachers who are happy to have them exiled from classrooms and into CEP. Furthermore, when Fallon admitted that she accepted at least one trip paid for by CEP to sell the company to new school districts, her credibility as the company's impartial champion crumbled.

As for my sources, allegations against CEP have now been leveled by one of the men who helped Rod Paige set up the Houston contract, the man a judge chose to set up the CEP program with Harris County, the man initially hired to evaluate the program, and the man subsequently assigned the task by Paige's office, not to mention several ex-employees. They all tell converging stories involving academic and disciplinary chaos. The women I interviewed regarding their employment at CEP chose anonymity because they were well-aware of CEP's political power in Houston and feared retribution; they also believe they were forced out over politics, not job performance.

Over-extended family

TO THE EDITORS:

I take issue with some of Andrew Sullivan's points in "All in the Family" (February 12). First, if an employment anti-discrimination law helps one gay person, what harm does it do? Why shouldn't gays be a protected class until bigotry disappears? Second, a better solution to bullying in schools than Sullivan's proposal—school choice,

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which breaks down support for public education—would be for schools not to tolerate it. Laws such as the one in California and high-profile lawsuits in other states are sending the message that hate is not tolerated in school. That's a good lesson to teach children anyway.

Finally, repealing the estate tax would help only wealthy people, would significantly hurt charitable donations, and would be a less effective solution than simply recognizing gay relationships. Marriage rights may "mercifully" be the "purview of the states and the courts," but thanks to thrice-married Georgia Representative Bob Barr's Defense of Marriage Act, the federal government is prohibited from recognizing a state- or court-sanctioned gay union. My partner of four years can't share my VA disability or Social Security benefits; he is not entitled to free medical care from the military or the Veterans Administration; he is not entitled to accompany me on free flights or share inexpensive military lodging while traveling; and he can't even enter the commissary with me to shop for food at many bases. We would gain over $10,000 per year in benefits if we were not a gay couple.

Do you imagine that the Log Cabin Republicans, the Republican Unity Coalition, or any other apologists will bring up these issues with the administration or Congress? Dream on.

KEVIN E. DAVIS
San Diego, California

Response to injustice

TO THE EDITORS:

May I correct an injustice inadvertently done to a valued colleague? In my recent piece on Raphael Lemkin, I said that Samantha Power's forthcoming book, *The Quiet Americans*, was a history of the Genocide Convention ("Lemkin's Word," February 26). In fact, it is on American responses to genocide and mass atrocity in the twentieth century.

MICHAEL IGNATIEFF
Carr Visiting Professor of Human Rights Practice
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Cambridge, Massachusetts

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Child Care

LANGUAGE, AS GEORGE Orwell famously observed, is a good sign of political mischief. I'm not quite sure when the words "estate tax" morphed into "death tax," but the shift speaks volumes. The words "death tax" belong up there with "hate crimes" and "affirmative action" as newspeak for pernicious political agendas. No matter what George W. Bush says, there is no "death tax" in America. Dead people can no more pay taxes than they can vote (Cook County excepted, of course). Nor is anyone's death taxed. What is taxed is a dead person's estate; and the point of this tax, as with all taxes, is to raise money for the government.

Is this an awful way to raise revenue? No. In many respects it is the least offensive tax we have. The most offensive—the progressive income tax—penalizes success and work. The better you do for yourself, the more the government punishes you for your efforts. The Social Security tax is almost as bad: The government absconds with your money before you even have a chance to look at it—and then pours it into an investment scheme no sane person would ever choose for herself. But then almost all taxes harm people, drain wealth, encourage inefficiency, and generally drag down the level of human achievement. Think of tariffs, which discourage trade, or sales taxes, which discourage buying and selling. Taxes are still necessary, of course, because, in an imperfect world, government is necessary. But taxes, even many liberals agree, are almost never good in themselves; they almost always substitute bad collective oversight for good personal judgment.

The estate tax is one of the few exceptions. In a meritocratic democracy, such a tax, in addition to raising money, actually does tangible good: It diverts resources out of familial, aristocratic channels into civic, democratic ones. And it does so only after a person has kicked the eternal bucket, sparing him or her the burden. What's not to like?

The significance of estate laws and taxes to the maintenance of American democracy was put best by Alexis de Tocqueville, the French aristocrat who knew the alternative as well as anyone. Tocqueville saw the essence of the American Revolution in the abolition of primogeniture, the English property scheme that ensured that land was kept whole within any particular family by passing it on intact to the eldest son and to no others. America's revolutionary abolition of this system helped disperse wealth and discourage the indolence of aristocratic inheritance. It was a subtle but vital change that, in Tocqueville's eyes, was the essence of the American democratic experiment. "I am astonished," he wrote,

> that ancient and modern political writers have not attributed to estate laws a greater influence on the course of human affairs. These laws belong, it is true, to the civil order; but they ought to be placed at the head of all political institutions, for they have an incredible influence on the social state of peoples.... [I]n a way, they take hold of generations before their birth.... By virtue of estate law, the death of each property owner brings a revolution in property; not only do goods change masters, but they change, so to speak, nature.

What Tocqueville means by this reference to nature, I think, is that property ceases to be an emblem of birthright, of status, of nobility. It becomes a good like other goods, to be bought and sold in a democratic marketplace. For Tocqueville, then, estate laws in America "made equality take its last step." They were for him, as they should be for us, an integral part of what American democracy means.

Estate taxes, of course, go one step further. They don't just break up unified familial property, they substantially reduce its value. Introduced in 1916, they were designed to counteract the soaring inequalities of the robber-baron era. But their spirit is the same as Tocqueville's. The kind of wealth our current estate taxes target—and its relationship to the wealth of most Americans—is far greater than that envisaged by Tocqueville. Merely ending primogeniture is no longer enough to prevent a super-aristocracy from taking shape.

If anything, in fact, it seems to me there is a strong case for increasing estate taxes and, indeed, extending them to people who aren't super-rich. Right now you have to bequeath $675,000 or more to pay the tax. By 2006 that will be raised to $1 million. A better system would be to make anyone bequeathing more than $500,000 liable to an estate tax and to increase the rates so that anyone bequeathing more than $10 million sees the remainder of his bequest go directly to Uncle Sam or to charity. (I see no reason why family farmers should have special exemptions. The government should be encouraging as many people as possible to quit the hopeless family-farm business, a racket whose subsidies already clobber taxpayers.) We should also do much more to ensure that the truly super-rich can't hire super-expensive tax lawyers to evade their due share. Any money raised this way should be used to finance cuts in income taxes—the real levy on democratic work and success.

The reason for expanding the estate tax is Tocquevillian. No one can be in much doubt that the deepest crisis in American democracy in the foreseeable future is increasing inequality. Since much of this inequality is a function of the rewards of knowledge in a global market, it's hard to solve. Punitive income taxes, the panacea of the 1970s, are like spitting into the wind of a social hurricane. But what we can do is mitigate some of the dangers of this inequality. We can invest in and improve public education; we can put an uneducated underclass to work; we can maximize stock ownership to spread the wealth; and we can make sure that vast fortunes are not handed down in European aristocratic fashion. We already live in an age of growing political dynasties, rampant nepotism, and creeping aristocracy. Keeping and expanding the estate tax is a small way to fight back.

I wish Bush understood this. He'd have an easier time winning support for his admirably broad tax cut if he didn't kowtow to plutocrats at the same time. Leftist demagoguery about the "wealthiest 1 percent" would also be undercut, and the entire package would look far fairer if it weren't for a tax break for the superwealthy. For good measure, trillions in future tax revenue would be retained rather than frittered away on Bill Gates's kids, helping prevent deficits that could tar conservatism for a generation.

And don't peddle me the family-values line. If rich people care about their kids, they should spend money on them while they're alive, not wait till they're in their graves before family values kick in. Better still, tell the kids to work for a living and give money to people who really need it, in donations to charity. Thus truly compassionate conservatives should have little truck with efforts to abolish the death tax. Conservatism should be about rewarding work, not inheritance, and encouraging success, not genetic dumb luck. One might think that a man who owes his office in part to his own bloodline might be sensitive to such arguments. But, then again, his willful obtuseness on the matter kind of proves the point, doesn't it?

ANDREW SULLIVAN

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Time for Him to Go

IN 2000, CLINTON FATIGUE hurt the Democrats. In 2001, it's downright destroying them. Some in the media suggest that the endless focus on Pardongate is keeping Bush from getting his tax cut message out. Nonsense—it's reminding Americans daily why they voted for him in the first place. Last year, disgust with Bill Clinton led millions who opposed Bush's policies to support him anyway. And this year renewed disgust is doing exactly the same thing.

If the Democrats think Marc Rich is just Clinton's problem, they're kidding themselves. Across the industrialized world, from Italy to Japan to Canada to Germany, the 1990s are littered with political parties ravaged by corruption scandals their leaders thought would tar only a few individuals. It's not enough for Democrats to denounce Clinton's pardons; they need to show that it's no longer his party. And there's only one way to do that: dump the apparatchik he placed at the party's head, Terry McAuliffe.

More than almost anyone else, McAuliffe personifies Clinton-era sleaze. It was McAuliffe who, as Democratic finance chair, dreamed up the idea of parlaying White House hospitality into campaign cash. It was McAuliffe who broke down the barrier between hard money contributions, which are regulated and go directly to candidates, and soft money contributions, which are not limited but are supposed to be restricted to party-building activities. And it was McAuliffe who presided over Democratic fund-raising while the party surreptitiously sought illegal money from foreign donors—the scandal, you'll remember, that probably kept the Democrats from retaking the House in 1996.

And then there's the corruption drama that may ultimately bring McAuliffe down: the Democratic National Committee's role in Ron Carey's campaign against James Hoffa for president of the Teamsters. Four Democratic Party officials and Carey campaign workers have sworn under oath that McAuliffe tried to help Carey illegally launder contributions to his campaign through the DNC. Specifically, they say McAuliffe tried to convince donors who had no particular interest in the Teamsters to give money to Carey on the condition that the Teamsters would make equal or greater contributions to the DNC. McAuliffe denies these allegations. But now that Carey has been indicted, a trial may well prove them true—or produce new revelations altogether.

If the Carey scandal forces McAuliffe to step down, it will be a disaster for the party. But McAuliffe is something close to a disaster already. His sleazy image makes him exactly the wrong Democrat to discuss Pardongate publicly. But his evident lack of public policy knowledge or achievement also makes him the wrong Democrat to change the subject to taxes or education, not to mention campaign finance reform. McAuliffe, who has spent his adult life in real estate and party fund-raising, has no expertise on any important issue, and nothing in his career suggests he has a vision for the party any grander than that its coffers should be full.

True, the Democrats have had undistinguished chairmen before. But it's a much bigger problem when you don't have the White House and therefore rely on your chairman to be the party's face on television—a forum in which McAuliffe is, not surprisingly, dismal. The Democrats also have never chosen someone who, from the outset, was sullied by scandal. (Ron Brown's troubles largely followed his tenure as party chairman.) There are plenty of candidates who could take McAuliffe's place. Former Energy Secretary Bill Richardson wanted the job—until Clinton talked him out of it so he could install the man who loaned him the money to buy his house in Chappaqua. Or, if Richardson also carries too much Clinton baggage, how about an articulate outsider like Washington Governor Gary Locke?

At the least, the Democrats should reinstate the division of labor that existed until this year, with the chairmanship split between a fund-raiser who runs everyday operations and a pol who serves as the party's public face. But if McAuliffe's ego can't stomach that—he refused such an arrangement en route to consolidating both jobs under his control last month—then party elders (Dick Gephardt, Tom Daschle, Al Gore, and Joe Lieberman) should take more drastic action. If Democratic bigwigs force McAuliffe out, it will spawn a week of stories about the party's disarray—and then give the Democrats a real shot at a post-Clinton identity. If they don't, the whiff of scandal will follow the party for the next four years, handing the Bush administration a patina of moral superiority that it doesn't deserve and a political advantage the country can ill afford. ■

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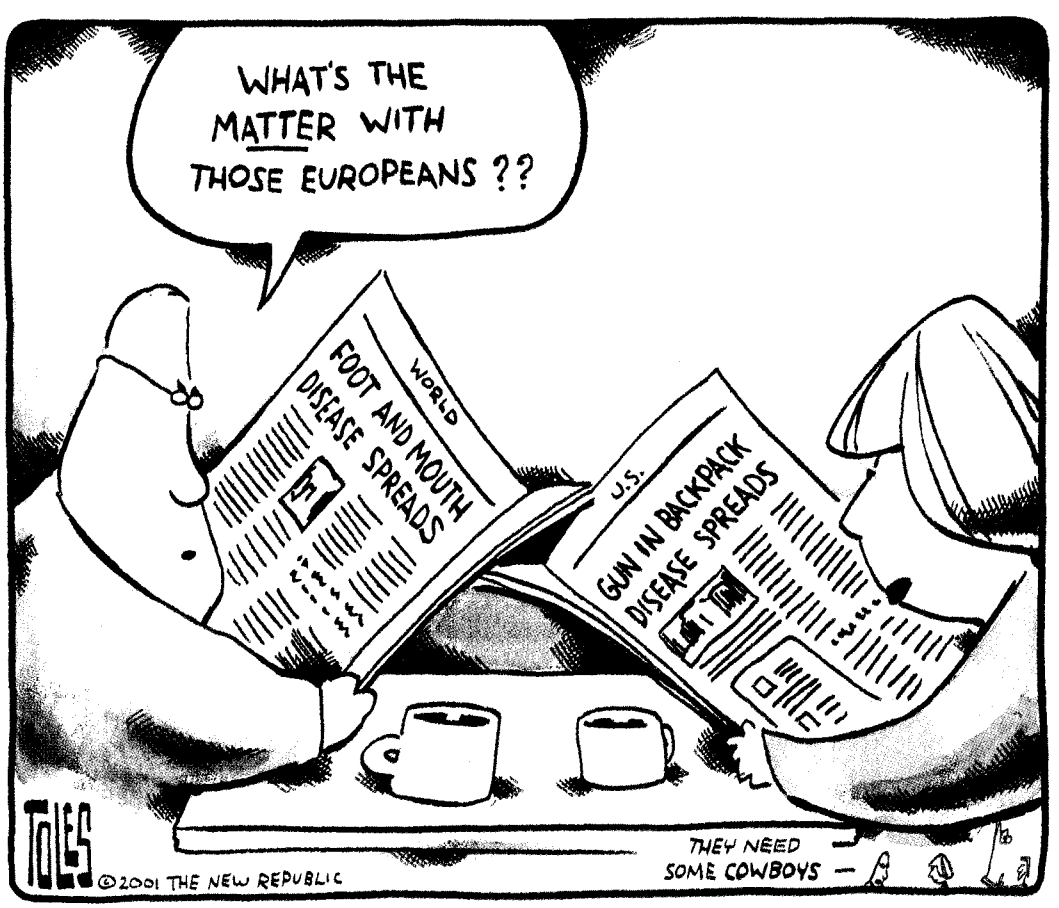
NOTEBOOK

STATUARY RAPE: Who, in the West, would not like to be known as an iconoclast? Smashing the idols is freedom's sterling task; or so we think here. But they are smashing the idols in Afghanistan, and it is one of the great disgraces of the day. And they are smashing them for the old reason, the theological reason. Mulla Mohammad Omar, the leader of the Taliban militia, defiantly declared that "all we are breaking are stones," because "[o]nly Allah, the Almighty, deserves to be worshiped, not anyone or anything else." The stones in question are the colossi of Bamiyan, a Buddha 120 feet high from the third century C.E. and a Buddha 175 feet high from the fifth century C.E., soaring giants of stillness that have now been attacked by tanks. Historically and aesthetically, these huge figures (and the paintings that surround them in their niches in the rock) are immeasurably important: They represent "the first appearance of the colossal cult image in Buddhist art," wrote the art historian Benjamin Rowland. "The influence of these first colossi of Mahayana Buddhism on the Buddhist art of the entire Far East is inestimable." Hellenistic, Indian, Persian, and Central Asian traditions of art and contemplation were all joined in these monuments. But none of this means anything to the pious Muslims who are aiming their rocket launchers at these masterpieces. (Or to their patrons the Saudis, who are similarly unperturbed by the Taliban's war on people.) After the issuance of the iconoclastic fatwa, apologetic noises were heard to the effect that this, too, is the fault of Western policy—that (in the words of the interior minister of Pakistan) "[t]his may have been an act of defiance brought on by the isolation they feel." This is rubbish. It is the inspiration they feel that animates the Taliban. They are doing this because they believe it is the right thing to do. For this reason, the outrage at Bamiyan is a clarifying event, and what it clarifies is the difference between the liberal dispensation and the dispensation of unrestrained religion. In recent years the threnodists of Western life have liked to dwell upon the enfeeblement of faith here, and to point out that culture is a sorry substitute for religion, and to exult in the moral superiority of all things ordained by God. Watching the barbarism in Afghanistan, however, we say two cheers for the frustration of religion, and two cheers for the belief in culture. After all, the Bible, *our* Bible, contains similar commands to destroy and similar acts of sacred vandalism. No, there is no Taliban in America; but this relief is owed in part to the influence of American democracy upon American religion. The resistance that religion meets is sometimes a moral and historical good. We are right to value our distance from our ancestors as highly as we value our ancestry itself.

MAYBE WE SHOULD INVADE CUBA, TOO: Tax cut enthusiasts have long invoked President Kennedy, who passed a tax cut in 1963, in an effort to convince Democrats to support cutting taxes again. And now the conservative Issues Management Center is producing ads that include excerpts from Kennedy's speeches to promote George W. Bush's massive reduction. The ads are not yet finished as THE NEW REPUBLIC goes to press, but the Kennedy quotations from which the Center planned to cull included the exhortation that "our present tax system, developed as it was in good part during World War II to restrain growth, exerts too heavy a drag on growth during peacetime." The quote nicely summarizes the idiocy of wielding Kennedy's tax cut to support George W.'s. The "present tax system" that Kennedy condemned featured a top tax rate of 91 percent. He slashed it to 70 percent. Today, the top rate stands at just under



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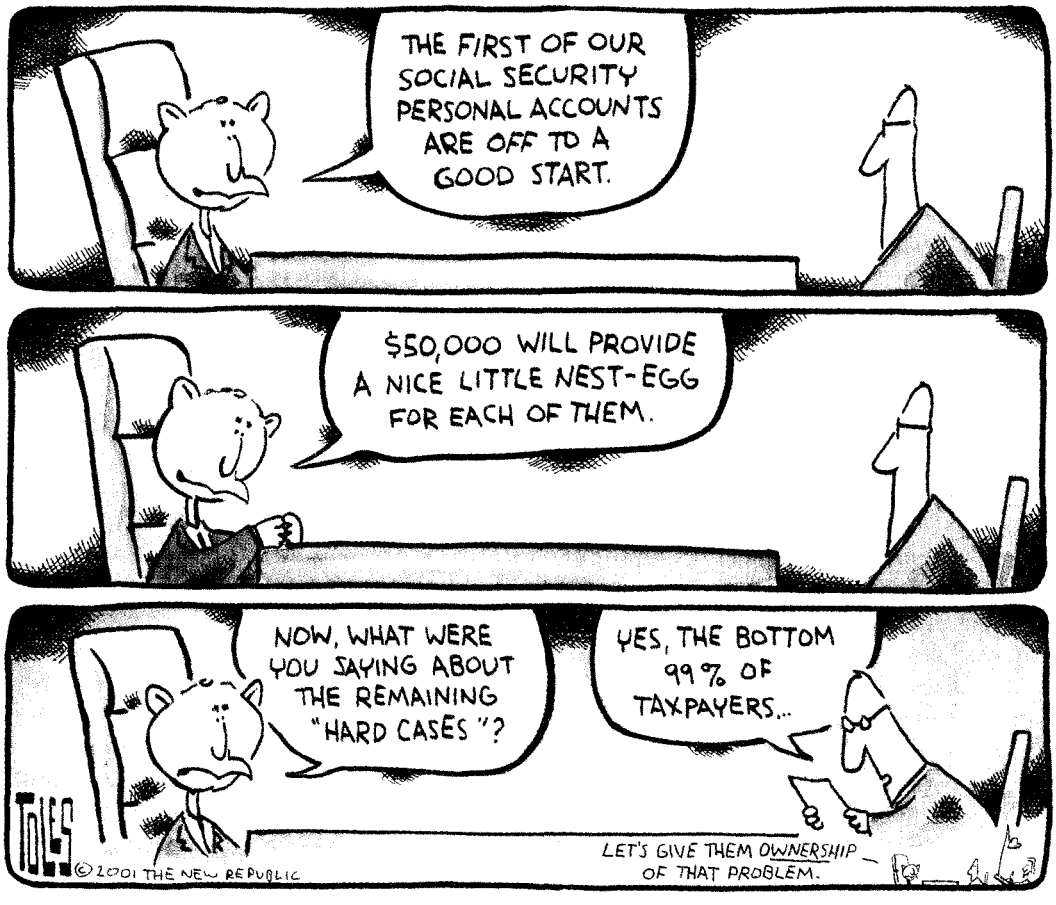
40 percent, and no one in mainstream politics, including us, thinks it should go much higher. But if *President Kennedy* supported a 70 percent rate, maybe we should rethink that position.

SNOW JOB: Last week, local forecasters, network evening newscasts, CNN, and the Weather Channel all proclaimed that "the storm of the century" was headed for the Washington-Boston corridor. Two feet or more of snow was projected for New York City and at least a foot for D.C. New York City announced school closures in anticipation; New Jersey asked some coastal residents to prepare for evacuation. And then ... only light flurries in the nation's capital and a few inches in New York. Significant snow did fall in parts of New England, but nothing like the real-thing blizzard of 1978. The sequence of events was eerily familiar. Just two months ago, in the days leading up to New Year's 2001, network newscasts, CNN, and the Weather Channel similarly proclaimed a colossal snowstorm about to paralyze Washington. The District of Columbia formally declared a "snow emergency"—and then ... not a single flake fell. Why isn't the weather matching the hype? Perhaps because for the networks, cable, and news radio there's nothing better than claims of a coming weather calamity to keep people listening to ... the networks, cable, and news radio. Weather scares are particularly effective at keeping senior citizens, whose anxiety levels rise at the thought of not being able to get around, glued to the radio and the tube. In reality, snowfall is extremely difficult to project more than 36 hours in advance. Forecasts of major snow two or three days hence—which is what weathermen were making last week—often fall through, while the heaviest snowfalls usually occur with only a few hours' notice. But why settle for a few hours when a little speculative forecasting can lock in viewers and listeners for days?

ONE FOR WOODWARD AND BERNSTEIN: "The plot [of Lynne Cheney's 1988 novel *The Body Politic*] centers on a 59-year-old vice president who dies of a heart attack.... The novel ends with the selection of the vice president's successor. It is his wife."—*The Washington Post*, July 27, 2000

"For lunch yesterday at the downtown McCormick & Schmick's, Dick Cheney joined wife Lynne, daughter Elizabeth Perry and son-in-law Phil Perry. While he holed up in the manager's office on a phone call, Lynne Cheney ordered her husband the seafood jambalaya and brushed off a waiter's warning about extreme spiciness, explaining that the possible vice president enjoys spicy cuisine.... When he returned to the table, Cheney took one look at the jambalaya and promptly switched entrees with his daughter, who had ordered the healthier blackened bluefish."—*The Washington Post*, November 30, 2000


THE FIRST OF OUR SOCIAL SECURITY PERSONAL ACCOUNTS ARE OFF TO A GOOD START.
$50,000 WILL PROVIDE A NICE LITTLE NEST-EGG FOR EACH OF THEM.
NOW, WHAT WERE YOU SAYING ABOUT THE REMAINING "HARD CASES"?
YES, THE BOTTOM 99% OF TAXPAYERS...
LET'S GIVE THEM OWNERSHIP OF THAT PROBLEM.
TOLES
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"Vice President Cheney, complaining of chest pain, was admitted yesterday to George Washington University Hospital, where he underwent a procedure to open an artery that had closed following treatment for his fourth heart attack in November."—*The Washington Post*, March 6, 2001

THE BEST ARGUMENT FOR TERM LIMITS SO FAR: "I'm eighty-three now. Abraham lived to be one hundred seventy-five. Isaac was one hundred eighty. Jacob, one hundred forty-seven. Joseph, one hundred ten."—West Virginia Senator Robert Byrd, on his prospects for reelection, "Fox News Sunday," March 4 ■

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White House Watch

Labor Pain

By Ryan Lizza

On Tuesday, in a grand hall at its Constitution Avenue headquarters, the Department of Labor hosted a "welcoming ceremony" for its new secretary, Elaine Chao. The confab of business, union, and political leaders bore all the hallmarks of the new civility George W. Bush has supposedly brought to Washington. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor praised Chao. Teamsters leader James Hoffa, who was wooed by Bush but endorsed Al Gore, gave a short speech. Chao, a convert to Bushspeak, said her job was "making sure that no worker gets left behind." She urged the audience to "put aside our position papers and party labels and start focusing on the larger issues that are facing our workforce." A helpful Labor Department press release explained that "Chao is known for her ability to bring together people of disparate viewpoints to discuss and solve problems." As if to prove her point, John Sweeney, head of the AFL-CIO—which spent some $45 million trying to defeat Bush last year—was seen chatting amicably with *über*-conservative Grover Norquist, the longtime activist and Bush ally who has devoted much of his life to crushing unions. Asked later how he thought Sweeney felt about seeing him at a Department of Labor event, Norquist laughed, "I think he had a sinking feeling in his heart."

With good reason. Just hours after the feel-good ceremony, the Republican-led Senate voted to kill the sweeping set of workplace ergonomics standards finalized at the end of the Clinton administration. Unions had fought for the rules for years, arguing that America's more than 600,000 annual musculoskeletal injuries make ergonomics, according to the AFL-CIO, "the nation's biggest workplace safety and health problem." The rules, initiated by former President Bush's Labor Secretary Elizabeth Dole, took more than a decade of research, analysis, and public comment to formulate. The Senate voted 56 to 44 to junk them after just ten hours of debate. There were no hearings and no opportunities for amendments or filibusters. The next day, after one hour of debate, the House approved the same measure. Absent further congressional action, the Labor Department is now barred from ever issuing any ergonomics rules that are "substantially the same" as those Congress just repealed. So much for bringing people together to solve problems.

This means Bush's first legislative victory isn't education reform or a tax cut; it's the repeal of obscure rules that most Americans have never heard of. And the White House is happy to keep it that way. While the repeal represents a huge payoff to Bush's corporate patrons and a swift kick in the stomach for the shell-shocked labor movement, don't expect a Rose Garden signing ceremony or any public gloating. Although Bush clearly supported the repeal, the administration didn't lobby publicly for it until just hours before the Senate vote, when it circulated a statement on Capitol Hill expressing unequivocal opposition to the standards. The White House neither posted the release on its website nor sent it out via e-mail as it does all other press releases. That wasn't an accident. The Bushies may be more hostile to labor than any administration in postwar U.S. history—including Ronald Reagan's. But the Reagan administration wore its hostility on its sleeve. The Bushies, by contrast, are hiding their struggle against labor behind relentless smiles.

The quiet assault started almost immediately after Bush took office. Some of the policy changes affecting labor are so obscure that they have received virtually no attention in the media. For instance, at the end of January the administration used a rare bureaucratic process called "deviation" to suspend a rule that requires federal contractors to have a "satisfactory record of integrity and business ethics," including compliance with tax, labor, employment, environmental, antitrust, and consumer-protection laws. The rule, pushed through in the waning days of the Clinton administration, essentially prevents the government from rewarding chronic lawbreakers with lucrative federal contracts. The Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the Business Roundtable sued to overturn the rule a couple of days after it was finalized. But that wasn't necessary, because Bush simply suspended it and is likely to kill it altogether. "We want a total repeal, not just a delay," one industry advocate told a trade journal devoted to asbestos and lead, which is the only sort of publication that has covered this arcana. "We served on the transition team and pushed for review of this regulation."

A much bigger blow to the unions came in mid-February, when Bush issued a series of business-inspired executive orders. Chao had just attended the AFL-CIO's executive council meeting in California, where she pledged to solicit comments from labor before the administration issued any decrees affecting unions. Two days later, without asking for Sweeney's advice, Bush signed four orders. One prohibits the government from favoring unionized companies in government projects. Another revokes a Clinton order that protected the jobs of contractor employees at federal buildings. A third dissolves a Clinton-era board meant to resolve labor/management disputes in government work. But the most important executive order reinstates one that Bush's father issued and President Clinton subsequently overturned. It affects nonunion employees who pay the equivalent of full union dues in order to gain the benefits of collective bargaining. The order requires all businesses that do work for the federal government to post a notice informing these workers that they have a right to a refund of the portion of their dues used for political purposes. This right stems from the 1988 Supreme Court case *Communications Workers of America* v. *Beck*. Ironically, the Reagan administration opposed the *Beck* decision, arguing that, as private entities, unions should be allowed to spend their money however they want. But in

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Out of the Ice Age?

Robert Conquest is a senior research fellow and scholar-curator of the Russian and Commonwealth of Independent States Collection at the Hoover Institution.

"The cold war is over" One sometimes hears this put forward with the implication that there is no more to be said on the subject and nothing to be learned from it. But, of course, events do not cease to be of significance because they belong to the past. **The cold war's effects are very much with us in two major spheres.**

First, the Russia that has emerged, since Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze abandoned the unappeasable and total claims of the Soviet regime in 1991, has only had ten years to start recuperating.

In Russia, a centuries-old tradition of despotism and imperialism was greatly enhanced by seventy years of continual physical and mental terror. Even the most liberal of the Russian intelligentsia speak of the distortion their minds still feel. As to the less liberal, recent events have left them with the imperialist idea of "Russian greatness" as their only conceptual refuge. In the early 1990s, Russian leaders were frank and clear about the issues of the cold war. That has changed—as is strikingly illustrated in a recent issue of *International Affairs* (which is in effect an organ of the Russian foreign ministry), where a long, unsigned conspectus of the past century has a sequence of such interpretations as,

> *The first steps toward a cold war were made by the United States, which would not like to see East Europe falling under Soviet influence.... The Truman Doctrine was one of the United States' first practical steps in the unleashing of the cold war....The Marshall Plan Talks on the program were at first attended by the USSR but it dropped out since Moscow was asked to pull out of East Europe, something the Soviet leaders could not agree to do. The Marshall Plan in fact initiates a split of Europe after the war.... The Warsaw Pact was founded by representatives of eight East European socialist countries who signed a treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance. It formed a worthy counterbalance to NATO.*

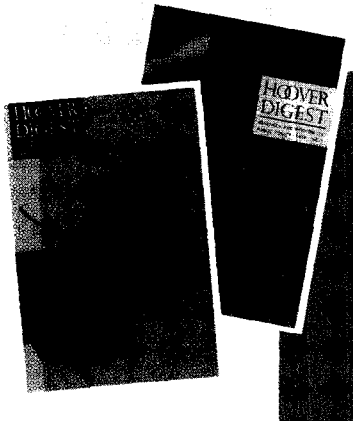
This shows a very nasty mood in Russian foreign policy circles—back to anti-Western misinformation and degeneration into worldwide troublemaking. Our own foreign policy makers have been aware of moods in Moscow.

But, of course, that false view is also found in the West. The CNN television series on the cold war, with Joseph Stalin balanced by Joseph McCarthy, Kennedy worse than Castro, was a large-scale example. But this type of thing is also to be found in a whole series of products of the academic presses that misrepresent the whole communist phenomenon—the educated media in general, apart from the CNN debacle, being less susceptible.

Such misleading attitudes can only have a bad effect on the informed Western citizen's grasp of today's problems and on the political circles that formulate policies. **Ignorance of history is bad enough but especially on these issues.** Thus, on these interpolated fronts, in Russia and the West, the cold war is still very much a burning issue.

— Robert Conquest

Paid for by the Hoover institution, Stanford University.



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the 1990s conservatives fought doggedly to codify *Beck* in an effort to cripple labor's political influence. In a 1999 essay in *The American Spectator* on how a Republican Congress and president could "enact reforms that will break the pillars of the Democratic Party's national structure," Norquist speculated that widespread use of *Beck* could radically deplete union coffers.

In April 1992, when former President Bush signed the original order, he did it in a Rose Garden ceremony flanked by Charlton Heston and Harry Beck, the man who had brought the Supreme Court case. W., on the other hand, issued his executive order with virtually no comment. There are reasons for that. For one, conservatives are so solidly behind this administration that there is little need for political symbolism aimed at the base. For another, W. has a history of quietly undermining labor. Texas is a right-to-work state with weak labor laws; so, unlike Republican governors from states like Pennsylvania or Illinois, Bush has never had to publicly accommodate unions or, for that matter, publicly battle them. In Texas he populated boards that oversaw occupational standards and workers' compensation almost entirely with representatives of the business community, even when statutes called for a labor/management mix (see "Taking Care of Business," by John B. Judis, TNR, August 16, 1999). And, as in Washington, he did it while rarely addressing the issue publicly.

BUT THERE'S ANOTHER reason for W.'s silence: Unions, while still losing members and damaged by the election results, are actually more popular with the public than they have been in years. In the early '80s, Reagan could pick high-profile fights with the unions—e.g., his firing of 12,000 striking air-traffic controllers in the first year of his presidency—partly because many Americans saw labor as arrogant and corrupt. Today, according to a January survey by Peter D. Hart Research, the percentage of people telling pollsters they have a negative opinion of unions has declined sharply—from 34 percent to 18 percent since the early '90s. That's part of the reason Bush almost never says anything negative in public about unions, even as he tries to quietly roll back many of the gains they made under Clinton.

And the unions can expect things to get worse. In about a week, debate will begin on campaign finance reform. Bush has signaled he won't sign anything that doesn't include paycheck protection, which would take *Beck* a step further by requiring unions to get permission from members before using dues for political purposes. On the minimum wage, Bush wants states and localities to be able to opt out of any increase. Bush has announced a 5 percent cut in discretionary spending for the Labor Department and indicated that his emphasis will be less on rigorous enforcement than on helping business voluntarily comply with labor laws. And, most important of all, Bush is in a position to replace three members of the powerful National Labor Relations Board as well as the board's general counsel. All of which has union officials experiencing that sinking feeling. ■

The Bushies snooker the Times on taxes.

Read No Evil

By JONATHAN CHAIT

IMAGINE THE PRESIDENT pardoned a wealthy criminal—let's call him "Mr. Rich"—who had written two $500,000 checks, one to the president's campaign and the other to his party. Critics accuse the president of selling pardons. The president's spokesman indignantly denies that Mr. Rich donated $1 million but refuses to say how much he did give. When pressed, the spokesman finally insists that Mr. Rich actually donated only $500,000—a figure he arrives at by simply ignoring the existence of the second check.

No president could get away with such an obvious falsehood, right? Well, it depends on the nature of the lie. In the above case, the president would be pilloried for his dishonesty, because, according to the conventions of contemporary journalism, reporters are expected to make aggressive judgments on questions of character and pure politics. On questions of policy, however, these conventions are turned on their head, and reporters are required to be rigidly even-handed—even toward assertions that are empirically false. Take George W. Bush's tax cut. On one of the primary controversies surrounding the cut—how much of it would accrue to the very wealthy—the administration's position is every bit as objectively untrue as the hypothetical case described above. And yet journalists have not exposed the lie. In some instances they have actively propagated it.

When President Bush unveiled his tax cut in 1999, Citizens for Tax Justice calculated that more than 40 percent of it would go to the richest 1 percent of Americans. Republicans dismiss CTJ as a liberal group, but its methodology is similar to the Treasury Department's. Indeed, the calculations aren't particularly subjective—since you know what tax rates apply to different levels of income, figuring out how tax cuts would affect people with different incomes leaves little room for subjectivity. Had Treasury performed the same calculation, it would almost certainly have produced just about the same result. This, one assumes, is the reason the White House won't allow Treasury to do so.

Instead, Bush's minions have replied to the CTJ estimate with a series of obfuscations. First, they emphasize that the tax cut would increase the proportion of income taxes paid by the rich. That's literally true—the top 1 percent pay 31.5 percent of income taxes now and would pay 32.6 percent under Bush's plan—but extremely misleading. Three-quarters of all workers pay most of their taxes in payroll taxes—a regressive levy labeled "FICA" on your paycheck. Bush's plan wouldn't touch payroll taxes. Instead, Bush has chosen to cut the income tax, which disproportionately affects the rich, and to completely abolish the estate tax, which affects the even richer. It doesn't matter if you cut rates

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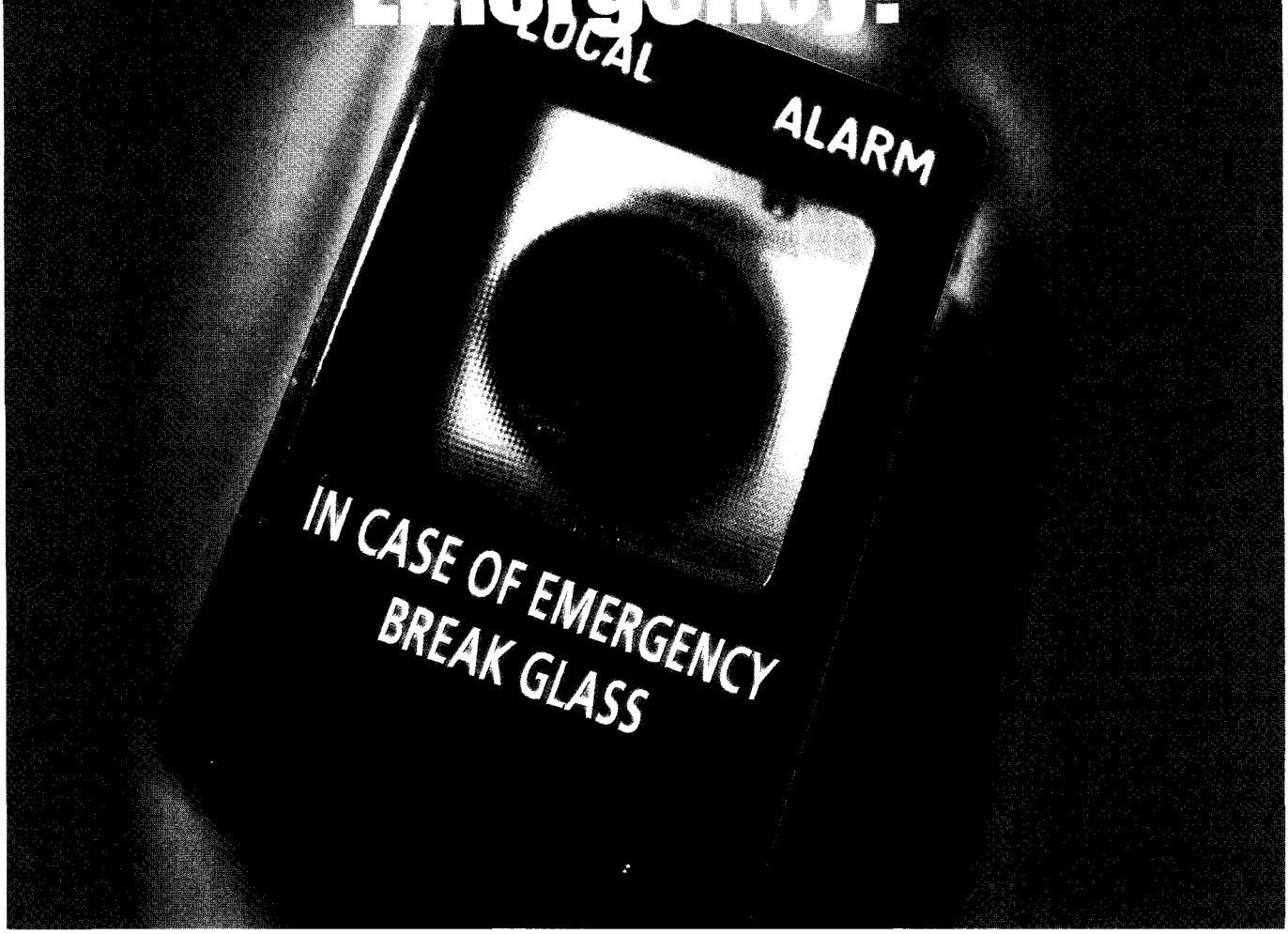
At 283 Million People, Is it Time For America To Declare A Population Emergency?



The 2000 Census reports America's population at over 283 million, exceeding the government's worst forecasts by millions and outpacing all industrialized nations. But that should come as no surprise. We see the results of overwhelming population growth every day in pollution, urban sprawl, crowded schools and congestion. If we don't do something now, a very bad situation will soon be a national crisis. Fortunately, there is something we can do. We can reduce immigration, and educate all Americans about the importance of smaller family size. Call NPG to find out how to help. It's time to sound the alarm.

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more at the bottom if you're cutting only the most progressive taxes. The top 1 percent may pay a slightly higher share of *income* taxes under Bush's plan, but they would pay a significantly lower share of *total* taxes. The Bushies frequently make the first point, clearly hoping the media will mistake it for the second. And it does. Last Sunday's *New York Times*, to cite just one of many examples, dutifully reported that under Bush's plan "the wealthy would wind up paying a bigger share of [the] national tax burden than they do now."

THE WHITE HOUSE has muddied the waters further by ginning up transparently dishonest numbers of its own. Last October, after Al Gore hammered home the 1 percent argument, Bush's allies in Congress ordered the Joint Tax Committee to do its own distributional study. The JTC found that Bush's plan would give just 22 percent of its benefits to the top 1 percent. But the study had two crucial flaws. First, it only went up to the year 2005, before many of the upper-income tax cuts are fully phased in. Second, and more importantly, it examined only the income tax portion of the plan, ignoring the estate tax repeal, the most regressive feature. The study, in other words, did not even *attempt* to gauge the distribution of Bush's total tax cut. It merely demonstrated that Bush's tax cut is not that heavily tilted to the wealthy if you ignore the portions of it that are most heavily tilted toward the wealthy.

One might imagine that a press corps capable of ferreting out the truth behind a decade of Clinton scandals would have little difficulty uncovering such obvious falsehoods. But the rules of newspaper "objectivity" hold that on questions of policy there must always be two sides, and that both sides must be treated equally, regardless of their relative merits. Thus, as a *Newsweek* voter guide explained last November: "Gore says that 42 percent of the benefits go to the richest one percent; Bush says the figure is only 21 percent.... The truth lies in between; just where, no one knows." Similarly, Sunday's embarrassing *Times* article stated that "the richest 1 percent of taxpayers would get between 22 percent and 45 percent of the tax benefits, depending on how the calculations are done." Yes, and either the Earth circles the sun or the other way around, depending on how the calculations are done.

Even reporters who seem to grasp the inaccuracy of Bush's statistic still apparently feel obligated to give it respectful treatment. When Bush rereleased the JTC "study" last week, *The Washington Post* reported that he "released a partial calculation yesterday showing top earners would get 22 percent of the total dollar value of the tax cut." But this was *not* a study of the "total dollar value" of the tax cut, only a study of its least regressive portion. Not until the ninth paragraph did the *Post* mention the crippling flaws that make the study "partial." And even then there was nothing in the story to convey to any but the most informed reader that Bush's number was not just vaguely incomplete, it was deliberately misleading.

Reporters would never let someone get away with such a clear-cut deception if the question at hand was how much money Mr. Rich gave the president. So why should the rules be any different when the lie is about how much money the president gives to Mr. Rich? ■

Why CBO isn't what it used to be.

False Positive

By NOAM SCHEIBER

"IT REALLY IS a crapshoot to be projecting for ten years," sighs North Dakota Senator Byron Dorgan. He should know. In addition to serving as the ranking Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, Dorgan spent eleven years as North Dakota's tax commissioner. His job? Forecasting budget revenues.

But, in a sense, the problem is even worse than Dorgan suggests. Sure, the $5.6 trillion surplus over ten years predicted by both the Bush administration's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) is essentially a wild guess. Even a slight change in economic assumptions could produce large swings in expected surpluses. In fact, CBO itself actually produces a range of predictions going as far as five years out, based on different estimates of economic growth: The moderate scenario (from which the ten-year estimate is derived) suggests a $503 billion surplus in 2006; but the most optimistic one predicts a $1.131 trillion surplus and the most pessimistic one a $92 billion *deficit*. Still, OMB's and CBO's budget projections have always been wild guesses. What's changed in recent years is that now they're virtually the *same* wild guesses. Which makes the debate over this year's budget more dangerous than ever before.

CBO's long-term budget forecasts have always been inaccurate. In ten of the last 14 years for which data is available, the fifth year of CBO's budget projection was off by over 14 percent. And that's only for five-year forecasts. The ten-year numbers look even more arbitrary: In 1997, for example, the first year CBO hazarded a ten-year estimate, the forecast for 2007 predicted a $278 billion deficit—a figure that had become a $532 billion surplus by the summer of 2000.

But, for all their faults, CBO's forecasts were valuable—because until late 1999 they were usually more cautious than those coming out of OMB. The reason was political: OMB is the administration's in-house budgeting shop. And while its economists are no less scrupulous than those at CBO, they have little recourse when political higher-ups trumpet their most optimistic numbers and ignore the rest. CBO, on the other hand, was conceived to offset this tendency. Since CBO's founding in 1974, its staffers have prided themselves on their independence. This was particularly true during the tenure of the widely esteemed Robert Reischauer, who ran CBO from 1989 to 1995. Under Reischauer, CBO solidified its reputation for conservative economic assumptions—forecasting growth of a modest 2.3 percent, on average, which is where CBO's forecasts more or less hovered until 1999.

But between 1996 and 1999, as we all know, growth defied all expectations, and so CBO's projections proved extremely

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Where We Stand

A commentary on public education and other critical issues

First Things First

By SANDRA FELDMAN, President
American Federation of Teachers

Even Americans who have no children agree: Young people are the future of our nation. This means that our national priority must be to invest in superior teaching and learning, to build strong schools, to ensure quality health care for every child so he or she can focus on learning, and to provide the kinds of support that teachers, students, parents, and communities need to ensure the success and well-being of every child.

In his first weeks in office, President Bush has emphasized two major areas of domestic policy: an education bill and a tax cut. His education proposals in large part reflect the movement for standards and accountability that has created significant forward momentum in student achievement. While there are disagreements on his proposal among those concerned with education, there are also areas of consensus. His reading initiative, in particular, can be a positive step forward for our nation's children.

But, as anyone knows, you need to be sure how much money you have in your budget before you give a big chunk of it away. Even if a tax cut is correct policy, addressing it before securing a budget that guarantees sound investments in education and health care, especially for children, makes these programs less than the national priority they should be. Furthermore, a tax cut that is too large will require taking funding away from critical programs for young people, affecting not only children's ability to learn in school, but also their readiness to learn before they even get there. The president has recognized the importance of Head Start, and studies show that quality pre-school makes a tremendous difference in the lives of children. Will the resources be there to adequately fund these programs?

We need to build on our successes

Robert Rubin, former secretary of the Treasury, who guided us through years of prosperity and growth, recently warned that a tax cut of the magnitude being proposed would use up the budget surplus with no additional debt reduction. If that happens, it would hinder our ability to meet the needs of children and families long into the future.

Consider that local schools and communities across the country have created, with the help of federal dollars, quality after-school, extended day, and summer school programming. These programs help children learn more and help schools and communities provide a structured environment that keeps kids safe and off the streets. They get young people involved in constructive, educational activities, including arts, sports, internships, and computer training. They provide needed tutoring and mentoring, as well as health-care services for students who might otherwise not receive them. And, by extending the school day and year, they help children maintain academic gains they've made but frequently lose during summer vacations.

Let's make our children's future the top priority.

Thousands of local and national partnerships have been created to support these after-school programs, but most communities don't have the money to meet parents' wishes to expand these highly sought after extended learning opportunities. The federal government should help them.

Protecting our future

Other critical initiatives that have a significant impact on our children—from quality pre-school programs and smaller class size to technology in the classroom and a number of health care initiatives—also could be threatened. At a time when smart choices have to be made about how to spend our nation's budget, it is common sense to make sure we're taking care of our children before giving most of a tax cut to a small number of well-off citizens.

President Bush understands the American desire for a strong federal commitment to education. If he and the Congress maintain a strong federal investment in education, we can build on the school improvement and higher achievement that are already underway across the nation. Our leaders should focus on what works in education and what makes a difference for the majority of Americans there and in other domestic policy areas. They should produce a sound budget before deciding on a large tax cut.

President Bush recently quoted Yogi Berra: "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." As a nation, we need to set our priorities and choose a *path*, not the fork in the road. Let's make sure we go down the path that makes a difference for our nation's children. ▮

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conservative. Some CBO economists became convinced that the productivity gains they had assumed to be temporary might be permanent. What's more, the groans from members of Congress—eager to cash in on the surplus bonanza—got louder with each successive lowballing. So CBO, led by economist Robert A. Dennis, raised its growth assumption. The adjustments, first in late 1999 (from 2.3 percent to around 2.7 percent) and then again late last year (from 2.7 percent to 3.0 percent), brought CBO's budget predictions roughly in line with the rosier ones now being offered by Bush's OMB.

AT FIRST GLANCE, the revisions might seem prudent; after all, between 1996 and 1998 the Clinton OMB's forecasts were closer to the mark (though more cautious than those of previous administrations). But there's no reason to believe OMB's assumptions were inherently superior—just that it was better to be optimistic during some of the strongest economic years in modern American history, years whose growth appears unlikely to be repeated in the near future. And having CBO as a conservative counterweight to OMB had real advantages. First, having two different sets of predictions highlighted the uncertainty of long-term projections—now that OMB and CBO are both forecasting a $5.6 trillion surplus, politicians and journalists are more likely to view that number as fact rather than guesswork. More importantly, though, it's a lot better to be pessimistic and wrong than optimistic and wrong; legislative action based on overoptimistic assumptions—excessive tax cuts, excessive spending—is much more difficult to reverse than the opposite: smaller tax cuts and less spending.

And CBO's shift is particularly worrisome because it coincides with a shift in the political significance of budget projections. Until recently, budget projections only set the *parameters* of fiscal policy; they didn't drive the policies themselves. Consider Ronald Reagan, the last president bent on enacting a major tax cut. Even with unrealistically upbeat supply-side assumptions, Reagan's OMB still predicted his tax cut would be followed by years of increased deficits, forcing Reagan to sell the cuts on their own dubious economic merits. These days, by contrast, surplus projections almost single-handedly drive fiscal policy. Deciding what to do with projected surpluses was the primary preoccupation of Bill Clinton's final years as president. And although Bush has to date offered at least three separate rationales for tax cuts, only one—that we have (or, rather, expect to have) extra money lying around—has gained traction. Bush conceded as much in his recent address to Congress, when he said that "the people of America have been overcharged, and on their behalf I am here asking for a refund."

The point is that budget projections are no longer like other economic forecasts, in which the object is to get as close to the truth as possible. With the projections driving policy and with errors considerably more costly in one direction than the other, the goal should be to minimize the damage that arises if a given projection is incorrect. Whatever their flaws, past CBO estimates reflected this logic. Now they're just wrong. ■

The men's rights movement takes on the NIH.

Ill-Considered

By CATHY YOUNG

ON VALENTINE'S DAY, activists held a Capitol Hill press conference to deplore medicine's neglect of an entire gender. Nothing is new about that; for years feminists have been clamoring that patriarchal health care shortchanges women. But there was a twist: This time the focus was on the neglect of men. The occasion was the introduction of the Men's Health Act, under which a newly created Office of Men's Health within the Department of Health and Human Services would "coordinate and promote the status of men's health." Men's health advocates say that while the government has lavished resources on women's health for years, men's concerns—from prostate and testicular cancer to higher mortality rates—have gotten short shrift. When it comes to health, author Armin Brott, one of the speakers at the press conference, wrote recently in the Albany *Times Union*, "it's about time we started treating men as well as we treat women."

Maybe; maybe not. Sure, special-interest lobbying has produced a disproportionate focus on female-specific health issues. But parallel pleading on behalf of men may compound rather than solve the problem—furthering the unhappy trend of viewing medicine through the lens of gender politics.

Women's health first gained political prominence in the early '90s, when the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues took up the cause. Armed with damning statistics—for instance, the fact that in 1987 less than 14 percent of National Institutes of Health funds went to research on women's health—and aided by outrage over a large all-male study, first reported in 1988, of aspirin's role in preventing heart attacks, the congresswomen secured a women's health office at the NIH and increased research funding for diseases afflicting only, or predominantly, women.

But there was always less to the problem than met the eye. The bulk of the NIH's research budget, for instance, went to studies that benefited both sexes, not just men; male-specific health projects accounted for less than 7 percent of total expenditures, half of what women's health was getting. As Johns Hopkins School of Public Health Professors Curtis Meinert and Adele Gilpin report in a recent article in the journal *Controlled Clinical Trials*, there is little evidence to suggest that researchers excluded or overlooked women and their problems. From 1966 to 1986, for instance, researchers conducted more than 400 clinical trials on breast cancer, compared with just 121 on prostate cancer (which causes

CATHY YOUNG is the author of *Ceasefire: Why Women and Men Must Join Forces to Achieve True Equality.*

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nearly as many deaths, though at a later age). While some clinical trials were indeed limited to men, it was often for compelling reasons: When investigating heart-attack prevention, for example, it makes sense to start with a relatively high-risk group such as middle-aged men, who are three times more likely than women to suffer a fatal heart attack before age 65.

Certainly women's health activism has had some salutary effects, like drawing greater attention to heart disease and breast health in women. But it has also fostered new gender antagonism with wild charges that sexist legislators and policymakers don't care about women's lives. And, over time, it has produced new disparities. Today, thanks to aggressive, legally mandated efforts to expand women's inclusion in medical trials, fewer than one-third of NIH subjects are men. William Harlan, director of disease prevention at the NIH, attributes this to female-only trials needed to replicate earlier all-male heart studies. Yet the lowest proportion of men—29 percent—is in cancer studies, in which women were never underrepresented.

Men's health activists, likewise, have some worthy goals. They have successfully pushed for much-needed research on prostate cancer. (Government funding for prostate cancer research still lags behind funding for breast cancer research, but the gap has narrowed.) And few would object to their call for initiatives to educate men about taking better care of themselves.

But there is a downside as well. For one thing, making health care into a gender issue often produces bad or dubious medicine. Take regular, universal prostate cancer screening after age 50: Men's health advocates champion it as a necessary counterpart to mammograms for women, and an Office of Men's Health would likely promote such testing. Yet researchers and medical professionals vigorously disagree about whether the benefits of early detection outweigh the risks of unnecessary surgery. The danger is that men's health activists may win the same misguided "victory" on prostate cancer testing that women's health activists won on mammograms. In 1997 an NIH panel decided not to recommend routine annual mammograms for women in their forties, pointing out that frequent false positives in that group resulted in unnecessary biopsies and alarm. The decision was widely condemned as insensitive to women. The Senate quickly passed a resolution defending routine early mammography, and under heavy political pressure the National Cancer Institute eventually did as well.

Another danger is that gender-based medical research, secured by powerful constituent groups, will end up displacing gender-neutral work that may ultimately be more important. The NIH's budget, after all, is finite; when interest groups push through more funding for their pet causes, the money available for other research goes down. That's worrisome, since some of the diseases whose funding could be cut—lung cancer and heart disease, for instance—kill more women and men than any sex-specific condition.

Curiously, many women's health activists are cautiously sympathetic to the men's health movement. "If men are starting to talk about prostate cancer and gender-specific

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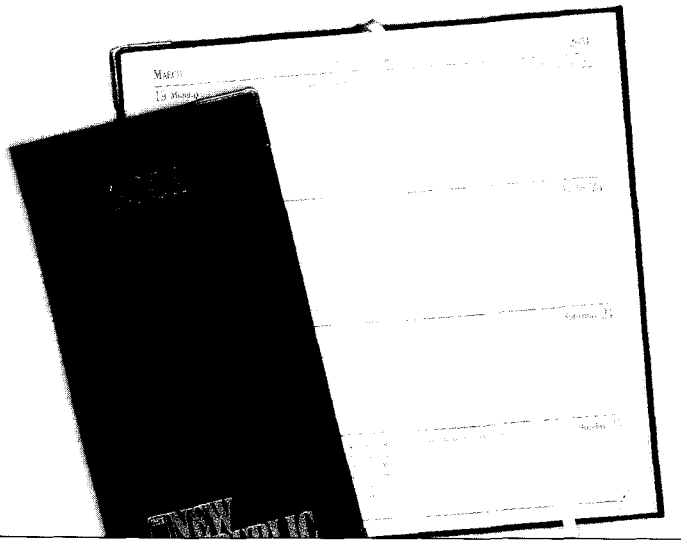

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issues," says Bernadine Healy, who championed women's health as director of the NIH in the early '90s and now heads the Red Cross, "that is a positive consequence of focusing on women's health, which led to a recognition of gender differences." But not everyone thinks that recognition is such a good thing. Andrew Kadar, a physician at Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles who has argued against feminist claims about medicine in *The Atlantic Monthly*, is put off by the alarmist language of the Men's Health Act, with its talk of a "silent health crisis" at a time when the health and longevity of Americans of both sexes are steadily improving. But as long as the women's counterpart exists, he's holding his tongue. "Since women's health advocates have exploited victim politics, men's health activists are responding in kind," says Kadar. "Unfortunately, it may be the only way to play this game." Unfortunately, he may be right. ■

W. picks an amoralist for the United Nations.

Contra Aide

By SARAH WILDMAN

ONE OF THE primary responsibilities of George W. Bush's new ambassador to the United Nations will be to berate countries like China, Burma, and Afghanistan for their violations of human rights. That's what America's U.N. ambassadors do.

Which is why, when the Bush administration announced its choice for U.N. ambassador this week, human rights activists did a collective double take. For although John Dimitri Negroponte has a reputation for doggedly defending U.S. interests overseas, he has at least as strong a reputation for making sure human rights don't get in the way. Midway through a foreign service career that began in the mid-'60s in Vietnam and continued through a stint in Mexico in the '90s, Negroponte served as ambassador to Honduras. It was the early '80s, and the Honduran government was killing and "disappearing" political opponents by the dozens. Most close observers, including some who served within the U.S. embassy, insist America knew about the abuses. And they accuse Negroponte of turning a blind eye. Says one human rights lawyer, "A guy like that is not going to be a very credible spokesperson for American principles on human rights."

Negroponte was U.S. ambassador to Honduras from 1981 to 1985. The Reagan administration had chosen the small, impoverished country as its base for covert military operations against the Communist Sandinistas who ruled neighboring Nicaragua. And Negroponte, a staunch anti-Communist who had proved his credentials on the streets of Saigon, was chosen to orchestrate the effort, building up military positions inside Honduras and training Nicaragua's anti-government Contra rebels just inside Honduras's borders. Under Negroponte's direction, military aid to Honduras rose dramatically, from $4 million to $77.4 million. To keep the aid flowing, the American embassy in Tegucigalpa needed to reassure Congress annually that Honduras was respecting the human rights of its citizens. Accordingly, Negroponte's embassy presented annual reports to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee promising, as the 1983 report put it, that the "Honduran government neither condones nor knowingly permits killings of a political or nonpolitical nature" and that there were "no political prisoners in Honduras."

But there were. In the late '80s the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, an arm of the Organization of American States, found the Honduran government guilty of "engaging in a practice and policy of systematic and gross human rights violations including disappearances, extrajudicial execution, and torture," says José Miguel Vivanco, executive director of the Americas division at Human Rights Watch. In fact, those abuses had deeply disturbed Negroponte's predecessor, a Carter appointee named Jack Binns, who served from October 1980 until October 1981. "I reported these abuses repeatedly," says Binns, "and urged that we take action to try and turn it around." In one cable to Washington after Reagan took office, Binns warned that General Gustavo Alvarez, chief of the Honduran armed forces, was considering modeling Honduras's response to suspected subversives on the infamous "dirty war" waged by

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the Argentine military in the late '70s. "Alvarez stressed [the] theme that democracies and [the] West are soft, perhaps too soft to resist Communist subversion," wrote Binns. "The Argentines, he said, had met the threat effectively, identifying—and taking care of—the subversives.... When it comes to subversion, [Alvarez] would opt for tough, vigorous and Extra-Legal Action."

A few months and several urgent cables later, Binns was summoned to Washington to meet with Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Enders, who told him to keep human rights violations out of his official reports and to restrict such information to undocumented back channels. "The rationale given to me by Enders," says Binns, "was that he was afraid this information would leak if it were reported in official channels and make it much more difficult to get funding from Congress." Not long after the meeting, Binns was replaced by Negroponte, for whom he left a briefing book that detailed human rights abuses in the country.

NEGROPONTE WASN'T IN office long before his commitment to America's policy of silence was tested. In 1982 Leonidas Torres Arias, a disgruntled former colonel then living in Mexico, accused Alvarez of operating a death squad to combat "subversives" within Honduran society. Alvarez, alleged Arias, had "under his direct command a 'Special Investigations Staff' " responsible for disappearances. But, where Binns had voiced his concerns, Negroponte and his team publicly denied the charges. "John mentioned... on several occasions [that] there was a concern of ongoing human rights violations," says one former high-ranking embassy staffer about conversations he had with the ambassador. But Negroponte, who has refused interview requests, didn't raise his fears with Washington, at least not through official channels. So vehemently, in fact, did Negroponte's embassy deny the death-squad charges that *The Washington Post* wryly commented that "the reaction of the Honduran government and the U.S. Embassy occasionally has appeared so defensive—even vindictive—that it raises more questions than it puts to rest." Hondurans were disgruntled. "Why is the embassy so satisfied with Alvarez that it ignores this situation of human-rights abuses denounced by Torres Arias?" one Honduran politician asked a *Post* reporter.

Hewing to the Washington line, Negroponte persisted with his denials. In a 1982 letter to *The Economist*, Negroponte wrote that it was "simply untrue to state that death squads have made their appearance in Honduras." The Country Report on Human Rights Practices authored by his embassy and delivered to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that year made the same claim. Further, the report explained, "there is no evidence of systematic violation of judicial procedures, and the Honduran government has taken action to discipline police who violated legal procedures." Alvarez was even singled out for praise: "The Honduran Armed Forces Chief of State Gustavo Alvarez recently issued a public statement denying that the government used torture and specifically stated that torture was not to be used on prisoners," the report explained admiringly. It also noted that "[a]ccess to prisoners is generally not a problem"; "[h]abeas corpus is guaranteed by the Constitution and Honduran law provides for arraignment within 24 hours of arrest. This appears to be the standard practice"; "[s]anctity of the home is guaranteed by the Constitution"; and "[f]reedom of speech and the press are respected." The joke in the embassy was that the human rights report read as if it had been written for Norway.

But more honest observers told a different story. As early as 1983 THE NEW REPUBLIC reported that an independent group called the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights "regularly publishes reports on disappearances, killings, and arrests" in Honduras. And, the year before, Americas Watch, the precursor to Human Rights Watch/Americas, subtitled its report on abuses in Honduras "Signs of the 'Argentine Method.' " In a damaging four-part series, Ginger Thompson and Gary Cohn of the Baltimore *Sun* discovered that in 1982 alone the Honduran press at least 318 stories of extrajudicial actions by the military. The series further alleged that the embassy (and a select group of higher-ups in Washington) knew of the abuses and that the American public as well as Congress were consistently "deceived." In 1994, when the National Commissioner for the Protection of Human Rights in Honduras published a preliminary report on disappearances, the first public recognition of responsibility by the Honduran government, it listed 179 people as still missing and unaccounted for. And in 1995 Rick Chidester, a former embassy aide under Negroponte, revealed to the *Sun* that his supervisors had ordered him to remove allegations of torture and executions from his draft of the 1982 human rights report. (After the *Sun* series, Negroponte denied that he had personally issued such a directive.)

In fact, it seems Negroponte would rarely have acted against human rights abuses at all were it not for the threat of public embarrassment. In July 1982 Oscar Reyes—a prominent journalist who had sympathized with the Sandinistas and openly criticized the Honduran army—was kidnapped and tortured along with his wife. When Reyes turned up missing, students protested and local newspapers reported the disappearance extensively. According to the *Sun*, U.S. embassy spokesman (and later ambassador) Cresencio Arcos told Negroponte that Reyes's death would cause a public relations scandal for the embassy. Arcos told the *Sun* that Negroponte intervened with Alvarez to obtain the Reyeses' release.

EVEN YEARS AFTER the fact, facing mounting evidence to the contrary, Negroponte has still refused to admit that the Honduran government committed systematic abuses during his time there. In 1987 *The New York Times* interviewed a former Honduran army interrogator who claimed that a "network of secret jails, special interrogators and kidnapping teams" had "detained and killed nearly 200 suspected leftists between 1980 and 1984." The article went on to note that embassy human rights reports "appear to have consistently played down repeated instances of politically motivated killings." The following year the *Times* accused Americans serving in Honduras of having helped "organize an army intelligence machine they could not control." Negroponte still stuck to the party line: "I have never seen any convincing substantiation that they were involved in death-squad-type activ-

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ities," he told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during his Mexico confirmation hearings in 1989. Six years later, faced with the evidence turned up by the *Sun*, Negroponte still couldn't quite admit what went on. He acknowledged to the *Sun*'s reporters that human rights had been compromised in specific instances, and he said he had worked behind the scenes to effect change. But, he maintained, "I don't believe it was a matter of government policy to violate human rights."

Binns doubts Negroponte's naïveté. "I find it difficult to believe," he says, "that an ambassador at an embassy doing its job would not be aware of [human rights abuses]. It appeared in the press, people spoke about it. So while it may not have been brought to his attention officially, it's hard to believe he wasn't aware."

But Negroponte's behavior makes sense to those who served in Honduras at the time. Lifelong bureaucrats, says one former high-ranking embassy staffer, have "an uncanny ability to tell the policymakers exactly what [they] want to hear ... [they] never let truth get in the way.... And John was ... one of these people." Letting Congress—already skittish about the Reagan administration's exploits in Central America—know the truth about the Honduran government would have complicated the Contra effort to which Negroponte's superiors were so deeply devoted.

Not exactly the moral sensibility you want in a U.N. ambassador—the person who, in the tradition of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, is supposed to take public, blunt, and often lonely stands against the thuggeries that populate First Avenue. But Washington has a short memory, and even Capitol Hill's most impassioned opponents of the Reagan administration's Central America policy don't plan to question, let alone oppose, Negroponte's nomination. "If there were ever a time for a nonideological, bipartisan foreign policy, this is it," says former adversary and potential presidential candidate Senator John Kerry. Seems like Negroponte's see-no-evil political style is catching on. ■

Why what everyone thinks is usually right.

CW

By Franklin Foer

There are certain ideas so beyond the pale they cannot be publicly defended. You never see politicians arguing for child molestation or op-eds defending Hitler. But there is one particular idea so disdained, so monstrous, that it must be pulled out and flayed almost daily: conventional wisdom.

Since 1980 the *New York Times* editorial page has published at least 38 columns condemning world hunger, 241 against South African apartheid, and 465 containing the phrase "conventional wisdom"—and never once did the *Times* mean it in a nice way. Like muckrakers railing against J. P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller, the *Times* editorial board has indicted the "barons of conventional wisdom." With ferocity normally reserved for Pat Robertson, columnist Frank Rich has condemned "the iron curtain of Washington's conventional wisdom." The New Republic has been even more hostile—savaging "conventional wisdom" in 352 articles since 1983 (and TNR comes out only once a week). The consensus against CW has grown so powerful that even CW's most distinguished purveyors now denounce their craft. In what can only be described as an advertisement against himself, *The Washington Post*'s David Broder has implored readers to be "wary of conventional wisdom." The conventional wisdom, in short, is that conventional wisdom is wrong.

But usually it's not. Today's journalists and intellectuals inherit their suspicion of conformity from the New Left: If everyone believes something, it's probably wrong. Yet CW, a broad agreement of elite opinion, is a time-tested means of filtering out the bunk; it is endorsed by philosophers and confirmed by social science. Sure, CW can be pedestrian. By definition, conventional wisdom is conventional. But it has the great virtue of being right.

The phrase "conventional wisdom" was born—appropriately, in a fit of contrarianism—when John Kenneth Galbraith coined it in his exquisite 1958 screed, *The Affluent Society*. Although ostensibly about economics, the book fits more comfortably alongside the radical sociology of the decade. Like C. Wright Mills and William Whyte, who decried suburbia, corporations, and the organization man, Galbraith loathed the postwar homogenization of American life. For Galbraith, "conventional wisdom"—the stifling conformity of elite opinion—was just another manifestation of the problem. Society, he concluded, rewards those who repeat old verities, rather than skeptics or innovators. "In the Communist countries," he wrote, "stability of ideas and social purpose is achieved by formal adherence to an officially proclaimed doctrine." In the United States, "a similar stability is enforced far more informally by the conventional wisdom." Under both regimes, "[d]eviation is stigmatized as 'incorrect.'"

Galbraith was hardly the first person to criticize bourgeois conformity. Bohemians from Flaubert on had posited the same essential critique. Just a few years before *The Affluent Society* was published, Allen Ginsberg and the Beat poets had railed against the "highly organized academic and literary movement employment agency of the Neoanti-reconstructionist [who form] a dense crust over American cultural life."

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But Galbraith and the Beats were fighting an uphill battle; most people in the unalienated 1950s and early '60s considered America's top-down consensus benign. Indeed, the men in gray flannel suits and the doyens of martini society bandied about Galbraith's phrase as if it were a compliment—as in "Thank goodness conventional wisdom, and not those hotheads, prevailed in the Cuban missile crisis." According to a William Safire "On Language" column touring the dictionary definitions of the day, CW was synonymous with "prudence." Many of the central cultural critics of the period—including Richard Hofstadter, Daniel Bell, and Louis Hartz—considered America's exceptional unity to be its great strength.

Only with the arrival of the New Left in the late '60s did Galbraith's critique catch on. In the ascendant culture of long hair and hairy armpits, conventionality was evil. Elites, according to the SDS kids, subscribed to a pernicious, coherent ideology intolerant of dissent, just as Galbraith had described. Like so many other New Left bêtes noires—the bureaucracy, the military-industrial complex, The System—CW implied a vast, nameless, faceless conspiracy.

In the New Left's view, the media functioned as the conspiracy's Ministry of Information, shamelessly shilling for greedy corporate bosses and the racist military. (Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent*, the locus classicus of this critique, assails America's "propaganda state," in which the press proudly serves as the capitalists' lapdog.) No audience proved more receptive to this indictment of the media than the media itself. Sorting through the detritus of Vietnam, news organizations flagellated themselves for having credulously consumed the government's spin on the war. To ensure it would never repeat such complicity, the media began to treat itself as just another elite institution requiring oversight and reform. Newspapers hired ombudsmen and media critics. Journalists began speaking of their profession with bemused detachment—lest anyone think they harbored illusions about the corporations for which they worked. And nowhere did this self-loathing manifest itself more clearly than in the media's tirade against conventional wisdom.

By the mid-'70s, sniping at CW had become a journalistic commonplace. Even a reporter as mainstream as CBS's Bob Schieffer could complain, in 1976, that "[e]very bit of conventional wisdom we've had about politics this year has turned out to be wrong." And by the early '80s it had become fashionable for Washington journalists to insert lengthy assaults against conventional wisdom into their pieces, regardless of the subject. In a 1984 column about Walter Mondale, *The Washington Post*'s Richard Cohen wrote: "The big hit of the summer movie season seems to be 'Gremlins'—a film about mischievous and malevolent little creatures that are hard to catch and even harder to kill. If Washington were Hollywood, it would make a film about an indigenous creature of its own called 'Conventional Wisdom.'" But nothing ratified this trend more clearly than *Newsweek*'s "Conventional Wisdom Watch," instituted in 1988. Portraying the commentariat's opinions with glib comments and fluctuating arrows like weather vanes, *Newsweek* seemed to be making an ironic point: that CW was as whimsical and irrational as the wind. Of course, there was an even greater irony at play: A magazine that had long been one of the towering pillars of CW was now making fun of it.

For all their establishment credentials, Schieffer, Cohen, and *Newsweek* were essentially replicating the New Left's ideological bias against authority. CW is still described today as if it were a shadowy government agency covertly imposing itself on popular opinion. The Associated Press's Mike Glover has ominously written that "[n]o one really knows where [conventional wisdom] originates." *National Journal*'s Charlie Cook says, "Conventional wisdom creates that all-important buzz that can either help or hurt candidates and political parties with fund raising, morale building, and momentum." And, in a widely reviewed 1992 book called *Fooling America*, ex-*Newsweek* reporter Robert Parry purported to show "how Washington insiders twist the truth and manufacture the conventional wisdom."

ROBERT GROSSMAN

AND CW DOES indeed represent a source of authority. But, all things considered, it's a relatively wise and benign one. The argument for CW stems from the broader argument in favor of consensus as the most effective means of uncovering and defining truth. In the United States, this tradition can be traced back to the eccentric logician and scientist Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), the godfather of American pragmatism. At a time when belief in old sources of authority—God, tradition, the monarch—was collapsing, Peirce realized that truth required a new source of authority. In the end, he concluded, truth is what competent people eventually come to agree it is. As he famously stated, "The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate is

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what we mean by truth and the object represented by this opinion is real."

Peirce's defense of consensus is not as facile as it sounds. Groups are simply better than individuals at ferreting out truth. In one classic social science experiment, a professor asked students to guess the number of jelly beans in a jar. Invariably each individual's guess was way off. But an average of all the predictions almost always landed near the target. As *The New Yorker*'s James Surowiecki recently described, Los Alamos physicist Norman Johnson has conducted a similar but more intricate study. Johnson asked his subjects to navigate a computer-simulated maze. In a first attempt, it took Johnson's subjects an average of 34.3 steps to get out. But when Johnson aggregated all the data and then navigated the maze himself using the majority's choice for each turn, the path was only nine steps long. Johnson calls this the "collective solution," but it works just like conventional wisdom. In essence, CW is the average of the punditry's opinions. It dismisses the ideological outliers and produces a sensible synthesis. In a country with liberal traditions as deeply ingrained as America's, modern CW usually rules out prejudice and demagoguery. Witness the way CW marginalizes Pat Buchanan, Louis Farrakhan, and David Duke.

There's another way to measure the accuracy of CW—through its human incarnation, David Gergen. With his turkey chin and soporific baritone, Gergen isn't a flashy pundit. Unlike George Stephanopoulos or Bill Kristol, he never turns handsprings of counter-intuition. Unlike Paul Begala or Robert Novak, he never breaks into fisticuffs with ideological foes. Yet, like CW, his judgments are based on deep and wide experience. He has worked for four presidents, including Democrats and Republicans. He shares CW's proclivity for careful moderation. Regarding the Clinton-Lazio Senate race, he told Larry King, "[W]hen you turn Hillary into a victim, you're only going to help her." On "Nightline" last March he predicted that the presidential election "is going to be a very, very hard, closely fought campaign. It's going to be state by state." And last week he told King that Bill Clinton's pardons have "hurt him considerably. I do think it has destroyed any serious possibility that his wife would be the presidential nominee in 2004." In fact, after scouring his public comments over the past six months, I couldn't find a single incorrect pronouncement. True, Gergen's assertions weren't terribly interesting or creative. But the rap against conventional wisdom isn't that it's boring, which it often is; it's that it's wrong.

And it's not just his analyses—Gergen's moral impulses are also impeccable. During his stint as Clinton's all-purpose guru from 1993 to 1994, Gergen, arguing the conventional wisdom that stonewalling never works, implored the president to allow *Washington Post* reporters to peruse all the documents pertaining to Whitewater. If Clinton had heeded Gergen, the press likely would have seen how picayune the Republican complaints truly were, and the scandal would have faded. In addition, Gergen tried to steer Clinton away from the more liberal policies that alienated white men (e.g., Hillarycare) and toward the centrist politics that characterized Clinton's more successful second term (e.g., welfare reform). His post-White House punditry is nearly as impressive. In seemingly every TV appearance he condemns "the politics of personal destruction" and calls for politicians to act like statesmen. Who can argue with that?

Gergen's are the clearest example. But think of the numerous other conventional views the past year has proved true. Low expectations did redound to George W. Bush's favor in the debates; Clinton fatigue did hurt Al Gore; Bush's easy-going personality did help him politically; Florida did prove central to the election's outcome; both candidates did shatter past campaign spending records; George W.'s administration does look like his father's; Bush doesn't have a strong grasp of policy; the recession is helping his tax cut. These points now seem hopelessly banal. But they are banal because they are so unassailably correct—and have become so thoroughly enmeshed in everyone's thinking.

If conventional wisdom is so wonderful, you might ask, why is the conventional wisdom about conventional wisdom so wrong? But the question answers itself. Conventional wisdom no longer takes itself seriously.

Back in the 1950s conventional wisdom could indeed be overbearing. Those who dissented from the consensus—Marxists, beatniks, gays—were stigmatized and relegated to society's margins. By most accounts, this conformity of opinion produced a decade of unspeakable dullness. Yet it's possible to exaggerate CW's tyranny. Galbraith and the New Left caricatured CW as not just conservative but reactionary—unyielding in its defense of inherited values. This criticism, however, misunderstands CW's careful regulation of the marketplace of ideas. Yes, CW is conservative. It makes it difficult for faddish ideas to win popular acceptance quickly. It stymies the widespread adoption of ideas that challenge its authority. But compared with other methods of regulating ideas—totalitarian dictatorships, doctrines of papal infallibility—CW is remarkably open-minded. American social movements arrive and shout their ideas: Ban child labor! Outlaw abortion! Redistribute wealth! And CW responds in its reassuringly predictable pattern. First it dismisses these ideas, then it argues with them, and then it reconsiders and absorbs the insurgent movement's best insights into the mainstream.

Even Galbraith conceded that CW could serve as sand in the machine, protecting society from hastily assimilating bad ideas. Sadly, the machine has now been greased. On television, consensus-minded pundits—Gergen and a few others excepted—are considered too dull for the air. It's the argumentative ones—Chris Matthews, Sam Donaldson, Bill Press—who get invited back and even win their own shows. In print, the older bastions of elite opinion, like the *New York Times* editorial page, now refuse to endorse CW, preferring a contrarian pose. And then there's the Internet and the accelerated news cycle: It becomes harder for consensus to congeal around opinions when the pace of opinion journalism doesn't allow for the slightest prolonged rumination. Of course, you might say this criticism of punditry, television, and the Internet is banal. You might even call it trite or clichéd. I say, damn straight it is. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Realizing the Real

I HOPE THAT Oliver Stone has seen **Series 7** (USA). If so, he must be gratified. His shabbily underrated *Natural Born Killers* has at least shown seminal power. The man who wrote and directed *Series 7*, Daniel Minahan, must know Stone's film. Minahan is plentifully talented, but it seems fair to say that it would have been much harder for him to arrive at this particular use of his talents without Stone as antecedent.

Series 7 is about the seventh series in a "reality" television program called *The Contenders*. (Nabokov said that "reality" is one of the few words that mean nothing without quotes, a precept that is becoming truer by the minute.) This sort of program infests television these days. The best-known current example is *Survivor* on CBS, a show in which we watch people who have been put in physically difficult situations as they try to deal with them and with each other. The several similar programs are also popular. Minahan has simply taken the idea to its logical insane extreme.

On *The Contenders* there are six participants at the start of each series. The object for a participant is to survive. Literally. He or she must kill the other five contenders, anyway those who haven't been killed by other contenders. These killings are done in front of the cameras that follow the contenders around. *Series 7* never deals with the legal consequences of the killings, but then, in another extension of a social paroxysm, Swift didn't bother much with legalities in *A Modest Proposal*. We have to assume that American law is so fascinated by *The Contenders* that it doesn't interfere.

At the start, a woman named Dawn, eight months pregnant, runs with pistol in hand into a convenience store and pops a customer, one of the contenders. Her personal television cameraman catches the murder. We learn that Dawn has won two previous series and has ten kills to her credit. She is contending again for the sake of her unborn child, whose life will be eased by the prize.

This is one of the milder moments in the picture. Also involved in the contest—all of them selected by lottery in a Connecticut town—are a pious Roman Catholic nurse, a working-class man whose marriage is disintegrating, a crazy old recluse, a teenage girl whose parents keep urging her on, and an artist who is dying of testicular cancer. (The screenplay's one movie neatness is that this artist and Dawn had been high-school sweethearts.) In the course of the film, Dawn gives birth—very much on camera. Also in the course of the film, we see deaths, very bloody.

The texture of the film is almost pure Stone. With the help of Malcolm Jamieson, a fluent editor, Minahan fashions montages in rich layers—glimpses of the relevant past and present in the middle of sequences, glimpses of reference, all while the violence of a scene is being taken so far that it becomes a distillation, an attar of murder. Most markedly in the Stone style are some clearly labeled dramatizations in which actors—should we say other actors?—recreate key moments in detail. This, as with Stone, wraps another tissue of cultural absorption around the ghastly material.

While I watched this horrifying and unblinkable film, I kept thinking, "We deserve this." See what it implies about us. First, some of us will do almost anything for money, especially if there is a camera present. (Don't *you* want to be a millionaire?) Second, the television camera has become a sanctifier. I once saw a woman go up to a television weatherman on the street, grab his hand, and congratulate him on his wonderful work. What was wonderful to her, quite obviously, was that she had often seen this man on television and that she was actually touching him. That woman, I think, would have wanted to be on *The Contenders*. It doesn't seem complete fantasy, alas, that some people would be willing to murder if it was going to be on Holy Television, free of legal consequences, especially if there was a substantial prize, too.

Moreover, it is clear that many people by now are able to live as comfortably with a television camera on hand as with a pet dog. This easement has been in process for at least forty years, since cameras were first installed in a home to make a documentary of conventional family life. Self-consciousness in the subjects soon disappears—or seems to. And this comfort with a camera seems to take a person into new realms of behavior. In Soderbergh's *sex, lies and videotape* a man induces women to confide in him about their sexuality merely by filming them with a camcorder as they talk of intimacies. Admittedly, sexual candor is not necessarily a step toward the murders in *The Contenders*, but the nearly thaumaturgic power of the camera tilts values scarily.

One factor is left untouched in Minahan's film: the effect of the murders on the cameramen. We see one of them briefly when he gets in the way of a contender who wants to shoot at a fleeing car; but much of the time I wondered about these invisible people who were actually filming the stalkings and the killings. The producers and the sponsors of *The Contenders* might have been snugly ensconced elsewhere, but these cameramen were right on hand and had the chance to warn victims. Are we meant to think that they, too, were suborned both by cash and by the fact that they were serving "reality"?

Put aside "reality" for the moment and consider realism (no quotes). Realism is the camera's realm and boundary. It is what the camera glories in and is limited to. "The realism of the cinema follows directly from its photographic nature," said André Bazin. No matter how fanciful its subject, the camera photographs it realistically.

This indissoluble marriage of film and realism, ordained by the camera, long ago produced a singular offspring. A segment of the film audience—or, rather, a segment of every member of that audience—became hungry for fact on screen. Two instances: neorealism in Italy after World War II, in which non-actors were preferred to actors; *cinéma vérité*, a self-explanatory term, in France and almost everywhere else.

With television, the hunger for factualism exploded. The distinction between what was on the screen and what surrounded it was lessened. Now it was no longer necessary to be handsome or beautiful or talented to be in front of the camera. Look at the weatherman. More: if he could be up there, why not you? Such recent films as *The Truman Show* and *EdTV* testified to the growing congruence between the watcher and the watched. More and more unified they become, closer and closer to the screen comes

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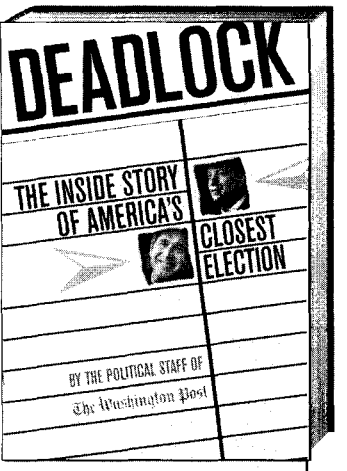
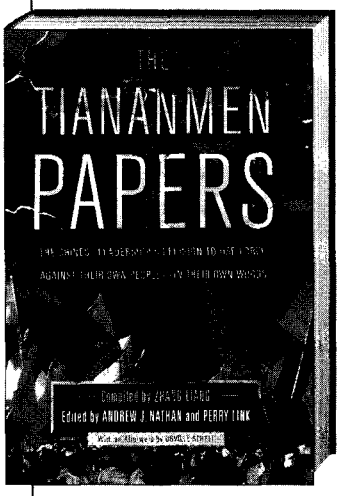
DEADLOCK

By the Political Staff of ***The Washington Post***



Deadlock is the first comprehensive, wholly original account of what really happened in the "post-election" of 2000, written and reported by the award-winning political staff of *The Washington Post*, America's premier newspaper for politics and elections. Drawing on hundreds of interviews with the key participants and offering details never before reported by any news organization, the *Post* staff has produced not just an original work of history-in-the-making, but a page-turner to rival the best political thrillers.



THE TIANANMEN PAPERS

Edited by **Andrew Nathan** and **Perry Link**
Foreword by Orville Schell

Here are the "Pentagon Papers" of China: documents smuggled out of the country that reveal what really happened inside the Chinese leadership during the Tiananmen Square crisis. *The Tiananmen Papers* will forever alter how we understand China, and how China understands itself.

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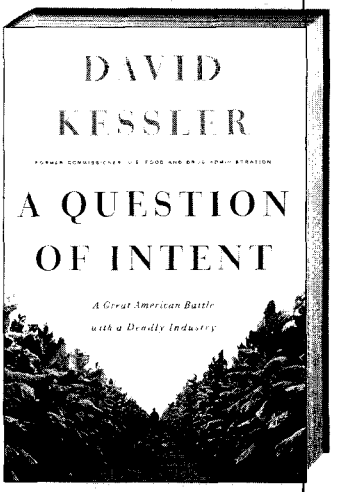
A QUESTION OF INTENT

David Kessler



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"[I]mparts an enormous amount of legal, political, and scientific information while maintaining the narrative drive of a thriller."
—*The New Yorker*

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everyone. Now, with a fierce flourish anteceded by Stone, *Series 7* shows the camera maw munching on. On us.

A possibly quaint note out of what may be becoming the past. "Reality" notwithstanding, the performances in this film are uniformly good, and Brooke Smith as Dawn is better than that. In the Gregory-Malle *Vanya on 42nd Street*, she was the best Sonya I have ever seen, and here she gives us a soul swirling in a torrential change of acceptances. ■

Robert Brustein on Theater

The Play About the Play

EDWARD ALBEE'S **The Play About the Baby**, now playing off-Broadway at the Century Center for the Performing Arts, has attracted what may very well be the most divided reviews of the season. Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* considers the play to be on a level with Albee's best work, while *New York*'s John Simon dismisses it as totally worthless and inept, a bigger lemon than *The Man With Three Arms*. Like most creative work, the play will undoubtedly have a longer life than will the critical opinions about it. But for the record, indifferent as it usually is to our hasty rulings, let me come down squarely on both sides of the equation.

For the first act of this two-act drama, Simon's assessment seems to be correct. During its first hour, *The Play About the Baby* looks like the theatrical equivalent of a doodle, a boring exercise in throat-clearing by a man with nothing in particular to say. It is bulging with grandiose typewriting and pretentious chop logic, of which the following is a typical example: "Nobody dies from not being remembered. From being forgotten, yes. Or are they the same thing?" You can fill a whole turkey with semantic stuffing like this, and Albee almost does. Only his self-conscious references to the theatrical process take up more space in the cavity. A more accurate title for this work might have been *The Play About the Play About the Baby*, considering how hard Albee labors to turn his metaphysical meanderings into meaningful metatheater. Characters address the audience directly, chatting about the nature of playwriting, the length of intermissions, the function of exposition, the dangers of smoking, the joys of drinking. The writer reminds me of a wayward bus driver making detours, shifting gears, careening off dividers, or slamming on the brakes to let passengers examine the landscape. If a character says something such as "No more shenanigans," that character is then obliged to stop and inquire about the origin of the word "shenanigan" ("Is that Irish?").

This can get very tiresome very quickly. But aside from the extra-dramatic digressions, the greatest drain on the patience of the audience is the abstractness of the play. The moment a playwright decides to call his characters Man, Woman, Boy, and Girl, he is destined to lose our confidence in them (and him), especially when he invests these abstractions with so little detail. Strindberg invented this convention, with generalized characters called the Poet, the Lawyer, the Lady, the Stranger, and so forth, and O'Neill was inclined to do the same sort of Expressionist heavy-breathing before he picked up Ibsen's "family Kodak" (as O'Neill called modern realism) and started snapping photographs of life as it is experienced. Abstract characters also used to be a favorite device of such radical German dramatists as Kaiser and Toller, as well as of (in this country) Marc Blitzstein and Elmer Rice—though not of Brecht, who famously said that "the truth is concrete." At the Century Center, the only concrete thing in sight is the foundation supporting the stage.

Albee's love of abstraction is an obstacle in the way of David Esbjornon's otherwise capable direction, even in John Arnone's simple symbolic setting—a wing-and-border design featuring a number of suspended baby objects (an antique wooden rocking horse, a wicker carriage, a huge pacifier, two colored blocks). Boy (David Burtka) and Girl (Kathleen Early) bounce through this space like bumptious teenagers, then scuttle offstage to have a baby. He is enchanted with her bosom ("I think I like both of your breasts equally"), and would like to share her milk with the suckling infant. Between their liberal bouts of lovemaking, they run around buck naked, somewhat like Adam and Eve, a fact the author chooses to italicize ("You'd think it was Eden, wouldn't you?"). Or maybe they are Adam and Steve in Eden, since Albee strews hints that Boy may be gay, and since the baby, at the end, turns out to be imaginary.

Albee has written about imaginary babies before, notably in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Because he was adopted at birth, there has been considerable speculation about whether this recurring phantom infant might not be a stand-in for the author.) But the baby is not the only device linking *The Play About the Baby* to *Virginia Woolf*. Man and Woman seem like a milder version of George and Martha, especially in the way they eventually affect the younger couple. (In the act of scolding Man, Woman even borrows a line Martha uses when scolding George.) Man, elegantly played by Brian Murray, has traces of George's lacerating wit, though here it creates bumps rather than blisters. He smells his hands a lot, in the tradition of Chekhov's Solyony, and dresses in the crisp double-breasted fashion of a Conservative British politician. The capable Marian Seldes plays Woman with a blend of vacant good nature and theatricalized hysteria, boasting about affairs with painters and writers in language that seems to have been borrowed from the pages of erotic novelists such as Molly Bloom's Paul de Kock. With her emphatic eyebrows, straining neck muscles, and knife-slashed mouth, Seldes always seems to be simultaneously smiling and screaming. It is she who provides the comic crust of the play.

Man and Woman are two more portraits in Albee's gallery of rich elegant WASPS, and they may or may not be married to each other. Indeed, relationships are far from certain in this plot, as Albee, in *Tiny Alice* mode, revels in the playful role of Mr. Mystery. Boy and Girl have no idea why this older couple is wandering through their house ("Have we rented out rooms?"), and they make no effort to eject them or to call the cops. In their innocence, they have only vague intimations that trouble is in store for them. "Is there anyone out there that wants to hurt us?" Boy asks the audience. "We have a baby, we don't understand each other yet, so give it a thought, give us some time."

The plea is poignant, especially in light of what is to follow, but the naïveté of Boy and Girl eventually begins to wear on the audience. Albee has not caught

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their rhythms very well, and he does not always capture their idiom with much precision. (Kids of that age do not use the word "asshole" to mean a stupid person, as our generation did, but rather to signify someone mean and bad-tempered.) Still, Man and Woman manage, just barely, to hold our attention during the longueurs of Act I, first through their repartee and badinage, then through their growing menace. "What do you want?" asks Boy. "Eternal life," Man answers. "It's really very simple: we've come to take the baby."

It is at this late point that the playwright finally gets down to business and begins to invest his hitherto flaccid material with some muscle and sinew. I don't mean to say that he manages to shed altogether his mannerist posturing, a quality that almost seems woven into the fabric of the plot. There is a lot of palaver about how "we can't take glory because it shows us the abyss," and other such quasi-philosophical non sequiturs. There is considerable sucking up to the audience (unusual for Albee), especially in Man's post-intermission maunderings. There is a pious, mechanical, and totally irrelevant reference to the lot of the "less fortunate." And there is a good deal of mystification for its own sake, such as when Man claims to have six children—two white, two black, and two green.

But there is also a certain amount of genuine tension created regarding the fate of the baby and whether or not it actually exists. Girl has no evidence of scarring after her cesarean section, just as Boy has no sign of a fracture in the arm that was broken by hoodlums. One of them had unzipped his fly as if to urinate on him ("Maybe it was what you wanted," insinuates Man). "I am your destination," Man tells Boy, going on to add, "If you don't have the wound of a broken heart, how do you know you're alive?" Remarks like this can make the gorge rise to dizzying heights. For Man is suggesting that the kidnapping of Boy and Girl's baby, the exposure of their illusions, the stripping of their hearts, is all being done for their own good, to bring them into some kind of emotional maturity. Albee manages to rescue the moment from total mawkishness by means of a comic device. While Man is expatiating on the meaning of life, the importance of suffering, and blah blah blah, Woman starts signing his speech, as if for an audience of the deaf. There are times when you wish the whole play had been signed.

By the end, the baby is revealed to be nonexistent, through "the old blanket trick," a device reminiscent of the fake gun in *Virginia Woolf*. All that remains is for Boy and Girl to accept the reality of their childlessness and the bleakness of their fates. Man takes them through a doleful catechism: "You have a baby?" "Yes." "I don't know." "You have no baby?" "No." "Maybe later, when we're older." But once having admitted they were never parents, they immediately take refuge again in illusion. "I hear it crying." "I hear it, too."

Like most of Albee's work, *The Play About the Baby* is three parts charlatanism, two parts pretension, and one part genius. Trying to find a true gem amid this heap of rhinestones is exhausting work for an audience. The effort returns only intermittent rewards. ■

The Wisdom Project

By Susan Sontag

Another Beauty by Adam Zagajewski translated by Clare Cavanagh

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 215 pp., $23)

This wise, iridescent book by the Polish writer Adam Zagajewski dips in and out of many genres: coming-of-age memoir, commonplace book, aphoristic musings, vignettes and portraits, defense of poetry—that is, a defense of the idea of literary greatness. It is, to be sure, something of a misnomer to call Zagajewski a writer; a poet who also writes indispensable prose does not thereby forfeit the better title.

Prose being the wordy affair it is, Zagajewski's fills a good many more pages than his poems. But in literature's canonical two-party system, poetry always trumps prose. Poetry stands for literature at its most serious, most improving, most intense, most coveted. "The author and reader always dream of a great poem, of writing it, reading it, living it." Living the poem: being elevated by it; deepened; for a moment, saved.

From a great Polish writer we expect Slavic intensities. (The particular Polish nuance may require a little application.) Literature as soul-nourishment has been a Slavic specialty for the last century and a half. It seems hardly surprising that Zagajewski, for all the calm and the delicacy of his poetic voice, would hold a view of poetry more akin to that of Shelley than that of Ashbery. As it happens, the reality of self-transcendence has even less credibility among younger Polish poets (as the current issue of the *Chicago Review*, devoted to new Polish writing, attests) than among those writing in English. And Zagajewski's transposed religious longings—to live, through poetry, on a "higher plane"—are never voiced without a grace note of mild self-deprecation.

His most recent collection of poems was called, with charming sobriety, *Mysticism for Beginners*. The world (of lyrical feeling, of ecstatic inwardness) to which poetry gives poets and their readers access is one that defective human nature bars us from inhabiting except fleetingly. Poems "don't last," he observes wryly, "particularly the short lyric poems that prevail today." All they can offer is "a moment of intense experience." Prose is sturdier, if only because it takes longer to get through.

Another Beauty is Zagajewski's third book of prose to appear in English. The first two were made up of pieces, some essayistic, some memoiristic, all of them with titles. The new book, by contrast, is a flow of untitled (and unnumbered) short and not-so-short takes, as brief as a sentence, as long as several pages. Its mix of narratives, observations, portraits, reflections, reminiscences gives *Another Beauty* a high-velocity variance of mood and attack that we associate more with a volume of poems—lyric poems, anyway—which is a succession of discontinuous intensities, at different pitches of concern.

What kind of intensities? (That is, what kind of prose?) Thoughtful; precise; rhapsodic; rueful; courteous; prone to wonder. Then and now, here and there: the whole book oscillates, vibrates, with contrasts. (This is like this, but that is like that. Or: we expected this, but we got

Susan Sontag is the author, most recently, of *In America* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

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that.) And everything reeks of dissimilarity, savor, message, metaphor. Even the weather:

> The meteorological depressions of Paris have an oceanic feel; the Atlantic dispatches them in the direction of the continent. The wind blows, dark clouds scurry across the city like racecars. The rain falls at a spiteful slant. At times the heavens' face appears, a scrap of blue. And then it's dark again, the Seine becomes a black pavement. The lowlands of Paris seethe with oceanic energy, thunderbolts pop like champagne corks. Whereas a typical Central European depression—centered somewhere above the Carpathians—behaves completely differently: it's subdued and melancholy, one might say philosophical. The clouds barely move. They're shaped differently; they're like an enormous blimp drooping over Kraków's Old Market. The light shifts gradually; the violet glow fades, giving way to yellow spotlights. The sun skulks somewhere behind silken clouds, illuminating the most varied strata of earth and sky. Some of the clouds resemble deep-sea fishes that have ascended to the surface and swim with mouths wide open, as if startled by the taste of air. This kind of weather can last for several days, the meek climate of Central Europe. And if, after lengthy deliberations, a thunderstorm does strike, it behaves as if it were stuttering. Instead of a sharp, decisive shot, it emits a series of drawn-out sounds, *pa pa pa pa*—an echo instead of a blast. Thunder on the installment plan.

In Zagajewski's rendering, nature turns out to be wittily steeped in the bathos of national histories, with the crisp, bullying weather of Paris flaunting France's indefatigable good fortune, and Kraków's tired, melancholy weather summing up Poland's innumerable defeats and other woes. The poet cannot escape history, he can only transmute it sometimes, for purposes of bravura descriptiveness, into magic geography.

MAY YOU BE born in interesting times, runs the ancient (or at least the proverbial) Chinese curse. Updated for own hyper-interesting era, it might run: may you be born in an interesting place.

What Czeslaw Milosz calls, mordantly, "the privilege of coming from strange lands where it is difficult to escape history"—think of Poland, Ireland, Israel, Bosnia—prods and pinches, exalts and exhausts a writer such as Zagajewski, whose standards are set by *world* literature. History means strife. History means tragic impasse, and your friends being jailed or killed. History means perennial challenges to the nation's very right to exist. Poland, of course, endured two centuries of history's chokehold, from the First Partition in 1772, which in a few years brought about the end of an autonomous state (not restored until after World War I) to the collapse of the Soviet-style regime in 1989.

Such countries—such histories—make it hard for their writers ever completely to secede from the collective anguish. Here is the testimony of another great writer living in a newer nation condemned to nonstop dread, A. B. Yehoshua (as quoted by Saul Bellow, in an interview):

> You are insistently summoned to solidarity, summoned from within yourself rather than by an external compulsion, because you live from one newscast to the next, and it becomes a solidarity that is technical, automatic from the standpoint of its emotional reaction, because by now you are completely built to react that way and live in tension. Your emotional reactions to any piece of news about an Israeli casualty, a plane shot down, are predetermined. Hence the lack of solitude, the inability to be alone in the spiritual sense and to arrive at a life of intellectual creativity.

Yehoshua's terms are identical to those of Zagajewski, whose first prose book in English is a collection of six pieces published in the early 1980s called *Solidarity, Solitude*. Solitude erodes solidarity; solidarity corrupts solitude.

The solitude of a Polish writer is always inflected by a sense of the community formed by the literature itself. Milosz, in his own great defense of poetry, the address that he delivered at the Jagiellonian University in 1989 titled "With Polish Poetry Against the World," pays homage to Polish poetry for having protected him "from sterile despair in emigration," recalling that "in solitude too difficult and painful to recommend to anyone" there was always "the sense of duty toward my predecessors and successors." For Milosz, born in 1911, a Polish writer may never escape being responsible to others. By this rule, the stellar counterexample of Witold Gombrowicz—in his fiction, in his legendarily egocentric and truculent *Diary*, in his brazen polemic "Against Poetry"—offers evidence, convulsive evidence, of the authority of idealism in Polish literature. History is present, even by its absence, Milosz observes in *Milosz's ABC's*, his most recent book of prose; and the cult of altruism and high-mindedness flourishes, perversely, in Gombrowicz's denial of responsibility to anything beyond the self's anarchic clamor, his ingenious harangues on behalf of the menial, the immature, the low-minded.

Squeezed right, every life can be construed as embodying exemplary experiences and historical momentousness. Even Gombrowicz could not help but see his life as exemplary, making something didactic—a rebuke to his origins—out of his gentry childhood, his precocious literary notoriety, his fateful, irrevocable emigration. And a writer whose love of literature still entailed, unresentfully, so much piety toward old masters, such eagerness to feed on the magnificent traditions on offer from the past, could hardly help seeing his life, or at least his early circumstances, as some kind of representative destiny.

SOON AFTER ZAGAJEWSKI'S birth in October 1945 in the medieval Polish city of Lwów (now Lviv), his family was uprooted in the great displacements (and redrawings of maps) that followed the Yalta agreements of the Three Old Men, which put Lwów in the hands of the Soviet Union. The poet grew up in the formerly German, now Polish, town of Gliwice, thirty miles from Auschwitz. In *Two Cities*, his second prose book translated into English, Zagajewski writes that "I spent my childhood in an ugly industrial city; I was brought there when I was barely four months old, and then for many years afterward I was told about the extraordinarily beautiful city that my family had to leave." The family mythology of an expulsion from paradise, he says, may have made him feel forever homeless.

It also seems, on the evidence of his writing, to have made Zagajewski an expert lover of cities—"beautiful, bewitching Kraków" above all—for which he left unredeemable Gliwice to attend university, and where he remained until he was thirty-seven. Dates are sparse in *Another Beauty*, and the arrangement of stories-from-a-life is unchronological. But there is always, however implicitly, a *where*, with which the poet's heart and senses are in dialogue. It is not the traveler or even the émigré—most of the great Polish poets have gone westward, and Zagajewski is not one of the exceptions—who is featured here, but the continually stimulated city-dweller.

There are few living rooms and no bedrooms in Zagajewski's book, but more than a few public squares and libraries and trains. Once past his student years, the occasional "we" disappears; and there is only an "I." Occasionally he will mention where he is writing: Zagajewski lives in Paris and teaches one term each year at the University of Houston. "I'm strolling

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through Paris," one entry begins. "And at this very moment I'm listening to the Seventh Symphony in Houston," notes another. There are always two cities: Lwów and Gliwice, Gliwice and Kraków, Paris and Houston.

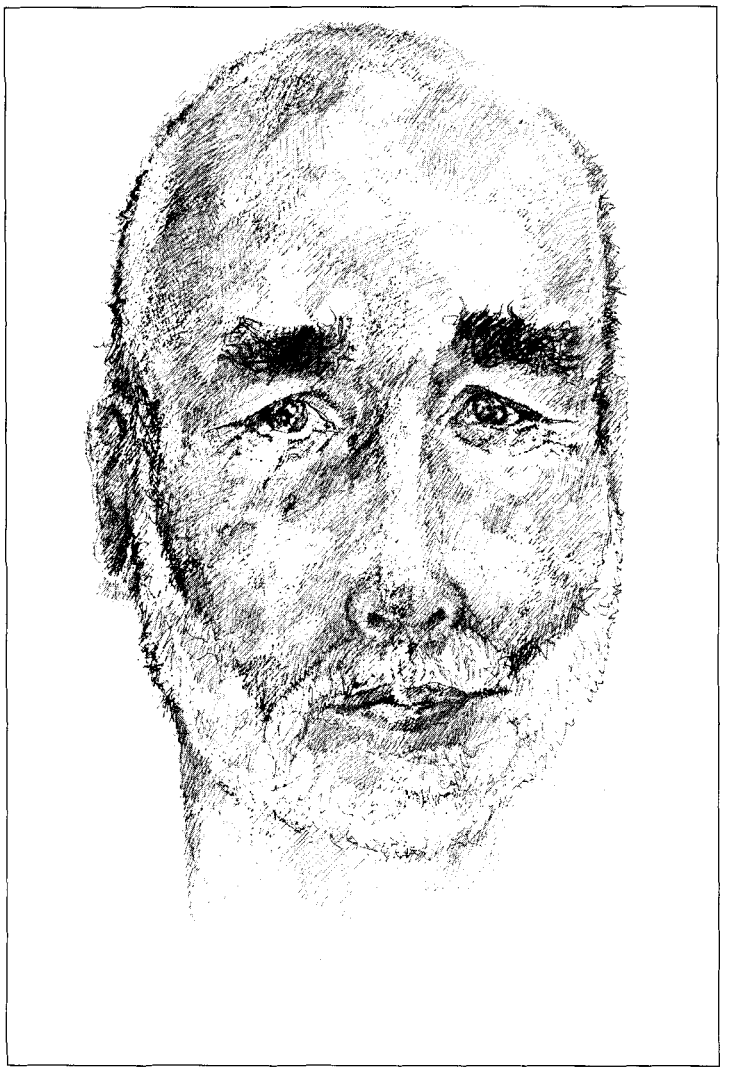
More poignant oppositions infuse this book: self and others, youth and age. There are plangent evocations of difficult elderly relatives and cranky professors: this portrait of the poet as a young man is striking for its tenderness toward the old. And the account of the decorous ardors, literary and political, of his student years sets his book quite at odds with the narcissistic purposes, and pointedly indiscreet contents, of most autobiographical writing today. For Zagajewski, autobiography is an occasion to purge oneself of vanity while advancing the project of self-understanding—call it the wisdom project—which is never completed, however long the life.

To describe oneself as young is to face that one is no longer young. And a pithy acknowledgment that the debilities of age approach, with death in their train, is one of the many observations that cut short a story from Zagajewski's past. Telling the stories discontinuously, as glimpses, secures several good results. It keeps the prose dense, quick. And it invites telling only those stories that lead to some insight, or to epiphany. There is a larger lesson in the very way of telling, a lesson in moral tone: how to talk about oneself without complacency. Life, when not a school for heartlessness, is an education in sympathy. The sum of the stories reminds us that, in a life of a certain length and spiritual seriousness, change—sometimes not for the worse—is just as real as death.

All writing is a species of remembering. If there is anything triumphalist about *Another Beauty*, it is that its acts of remembering seem so frictionless. Imagining—that is, bringing the past to mental life—is there as needed; it never falters; it is by definition a success. The recovery of memory, of course, is an ethical obligation: the obligation to persist in the effort to apprehend the truth. This seems less apparent in America, where the work of memory has been exuberantly identified with the creation of useful or therapeutic fictions, than to a writer coming from Zagajewski's lacerated corner of the world.

To recover a memory—to secure a truth—is a supreme touchstone of value in this book. "I didn't witness the extermination of the Jews," Zagajewski writes.

> I was born too late. I bore witness, though, to the gradual process by which Europe recovered its memory. This memory moved slowly, more like a lazy, lowland river than a mountain stream, but it finally, unambiguously condemned the evil of the Holocaust and the Nazis, and the evil of Soviet civilization as well (though in this it was less successful, as if reluctant to admit that two such monstrosities might simultaneously coexist).



Adam Zagajewski by David Schorr for The New Republic

That memories are recovered—that the suppressed truths do reemerge—is the basis of whatever hope one can have for justice and for a modicum of sanity in the ongoing life of communities.

Once recovered, though, even truth may become complacent and self-flattering. Thus, rather than provide one more denunciation of the iniquity and the oppressiveness of the regime that was shut down in 1989, Zagajewski chooses to stress the benefits of the struggle against evil that flowed to the idealistic young, in his portrayal of the flawed beginnings of his vocation as a "political poet," and his activities in dissident student and literary circles in the Kraków of the late 1960s and 1970s. (In 1968, Zagajewski was twenty-three years old.) In those heady days, poetry and activism rhymed. Both elevated, heightened; engagement in a just cause, like service to poetry, made you feel larger.

That every generation fears, misunderstands, and condescends to its successor—this, too, is a function of the equivalence of history and memory (history being what it is agreed upon, collectively, to remember). Each generation has its distinctive memories, and the elapsing of time, which brings with it a steady accumulation of loss, confers on those memories a normativeness that cannot possibly be honored by the young, who are busy compiling their own memories, their own benchmarks. One of Zagajewski's most moving portraits of elders is of Stefan Szuman, an illustrious member of the interwar Polish intelligentsia (he had known Stanislaw Witkiewicz and Bruno Schulz), and now a retired professor at the university living in isolation and penury. Its point is Zagajewski's realization, thinking back, that he and his literary friends could have seemed only like fools and savages, "shaped by a postwar education, by new schools, new papers, new radio, new TV," to the defeated, homely, embittered Szuman and his wife. The rule seems to be that each generation looks upon its successor generation as barbarians.

Zagajewski, himself no longer young and now a teacher of American students, is committed to not replicating, in his turn, that kind of despair and incomprehension. Nor is he content to write off an entire older Polish generation of intellectuals and artists, his generation's

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"enemy"—the true believers and those who simply sold out—for turpitude and cowardice: they weren't devils, any more than he and his friends were angels. As for those "who began by serving Stalin's civilization" but then changed, Zagajewski writes: "I don't condemn them for their early, youthful intoxication. I'm more inclined to marvel at the generosity of human nature, which offers gifted young people a second chance, the opportunity for a moral comeback."

AT THE HEART of this assessment is the wisdom of the novelist, a professional of empathy, rather than that of a lyric poet. (Zagajewski has written four novels, none as yet translated into English.) The dramatic monologue "Betrayal" in *Two Cities* begins:

> Why did I do that? Why did I do what?
> Why was I who I was? And who was I?
> I am already beginning to regret that I
> agreed to grant you this interview. For
> years I refused; you must have asked me
> at a weak moment or in a moment of
> anxiety.... What did that world look
> like? The one you were too late to get
> to know. The same as this one. Com-
> pletely different.

That everything is always different, and the same: a poet's wisdom. Actually, wisdom *tout court*.

Of course, history should never be thought of with a capital H. The governing sense of Zagajewski's memory-work is his awareness of having lived through several historical periods, in the course of which things eventually got better. Modestly, imperfectly—not utopianly—better. The young Zagajewski and his comrades in dissidence had assumed that communism would last another hundred or two hundred years, when in fact it had less than two decades to go. Lesson: evil is not immutable. The reality is, everyone outlives an old self, often more than one, in the course of a reasonably long life.

Zagajewski's book is in part a meditation on easing the clamp of history: liberating the self from "the grimaces and caprices" of history. That should not be so hard in the less flagrantly evil public world that has come into being in Poland since 1989. Yet institutions may be more easily liquidated than a temperament. Zagajewski's temperament (that is, the dialogue he conducts with himself) is rooted in an era in which heroism was at least an option, and ethical rigor was still something admired and consecrated by the genius of several national literatures. How to negotiate a soft landing onto the new lowland of diminished moral expectations and shabby artistic standards is the problem of all the Central European writers whose tenacities were forged in the bad old days. The maturing that Zagajewski chronicles can be described as the relaxing of this temperament: the finding of the right openness, the right calmness, the right inwardness. (He says he can only write when he feels happy, peaceful.)

EXALTATION—AND WHO can gainsay this judgment from a member of the generation of 1968?—is viewed with a skeptical eye. Hyperemphatic intensity holds no allure. Zagajewski's end of the religious spectrum does not include any notion of the sacred, which figures centrally in the work of the late Jerzy Grotowski and the theater center in Gardzienice led by Wlodzimierz Staniewski. While the sacral-ecstatic tradition is still alive in the Polish theater—but theater, especially this kind of theater, is compulsorily collective—it has no place in contemporary Polish literature. *Another Beauty* is suffused with the humility of a spiritual longing that precludes frenzy, and envisages no large gestures of sacrifice. As Zagajewski notes: "The week isn't made up only of Sundays."

Some of his keenest pages are descriptions of happiness, the everyday happiness of a connoisseur of solitary delights: strolling, reading, listening to Beethoven or Schumann. The "I" of *Another Beauty* is scrupulous, vulnerable, earnest—without a jot of self-protective irony. And neither Zagajewski, nor this reader, would wish it otherwise. Irony would come at the cost of so much pleasure. "Ecstasy and irony rarely meet in the world of art," Zagajewski observes. "When they do it's usually for the purposes of mutual sabotage; they struggle to diminish each other's power." And he is unabashedly on the side of ecstasy.

These descriptions are tributes to what produces happiness, not celebrations of the receptive self. Zagajewski may simply describe something he loves, or quote a favorite poem: the book is a sampling of appreciations and sympathies. There are penetrating sketches of admired friends such as Adam Michnik, a beacon of resistance to the dictatorship (who while in jail wrote about the poet Zbigniew Herbert, among others, in a book that he called *Of the History of Honor in Poland*); there is a reverential salute to the ancient doyen of Polish émigrés in Paris, the painter, writer, and heroic alumnus of Soviet prison camps Jozef Czapski. *L'enfer, c'est les autres.* No, it is others who save us, Zagajewski declares in the poem that gives the book its title and serves as its epigraph.

Here is "Another Beauty" in the new version by the book's translator, Clare Cavanagh:

> We find comfort only in
> another beauty, in others'
> music, in the poetry of others.
> Salvation lies with others,
> though solitude may taste like
> opium. Other people aren't hell
> if you glimpse them at dawn, when
> their brows are clean, rinsed by dreams.
> This is why I pause: which word
> to use, you or he. Each he
> betrays some you, but
> calm conversation bides its time
> in others' poems.

And here is the poem as it appeared in 1985 in *Tremor: Selected Poems*, Zagajewski's first collection of poems in English, translated by Renata Gorczynski, where it was entitled "In the Beauty Created By Others":

> Only in the beauty created
> by others is there consolation,
> in the music of others and in others'
> poems.
> Only others save us,
> even though solitude tastes like
> opium. The others are not hell,
> if you see them early, with their
> foreheads pure, cleansed by dreams.
> That is why I wonder what
> word should be used, "he" or "you."
> Every "he"
> is a betrayal of a certain "you" but
> in return someone else's poem
> offers the fidelity of a sober dialogue.

A defense of poetry *and* a defense of goodness, or, more exactly, of good-naturedness.

Nothing could take the reader in a direction more contrary to today's cult of the excitements of self than to follow Zagajewski as he unspools his seductive praise of serenity, sympathy, forbearance; of "the calm and courage of an ordinary life." To declare, "I believe in truth!" and, in another passage, "Goodness does exist!" (those exclamation points!) seems, if not Panglossian—one American reviewer detected a touch of Panglossian uplift in the book—then at least quixotic. This culture offers few contemporary models of masculine sweetness, and those we already possess, from past literature, are associated with naïveté, childlikeness, social innocence: Joe Gargery in *Great Expectations*, Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Zagajewski's persona in *Another Beauty* is anything but innocent in that sense. But he has a special gift for conjuring up states of complex innocence, the innocence of genius, as in his heart-rending portrait-poem "Franz Schubert:

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A Press Conference."

The title of the book may mislead. *Another Beauty* makes clear at every turn that, worshipper of greatness in poetry and other arts that he is, Zagajewski is not an aesthete. Poetry is to be judged by standards still higher: "Woe to the writer who values beauty over truth." Poetry must be protected from the temptations to arrogance inherent in its own states of elation.

Of course, both beauty and truth seem like frail guideposts left over from a more innocent past. In the delicate negotiation with the present that Zagajewski conducts on behalf of the endangered verities, nostalgia would count as a deficit of argument. Still, even absent the old certainties and license to perorate, he is pledged to defend the idea of "sublime" or "noble" achievement in literature—assuming, as he does, that we still need the qualities in art that are praised by such now virtually unsayable words. Hence his lecture, printed in the pages of this magazine almost two years ago, on "The Shabby and the Sublime," in which Zagajewski posed the pseudonaïve question: is literary greatness still possible?

The belief in literary greatness implies that the capacity for admiration is still intact. When admiration is corrupted, that is, made cynical, the question as to whether greatness is possible simply vanishes. Nihilism and admiration compete with each other, sabotage each other, struggle to diminish each other's power. (Like irony and ecstasy.)

Disheartened though he is by "the mutation downward of European literature," Zagajewski declines to speculate about what has given the advantage to subjectivism and the revolt against "greatness." Perhaps those brought up on the fierceness of state-administered mediocrity find it hard to be as indignant as they might be about the extent to which mercantilist values (often sporting the mask of "democratic" or populist values) have sapped the foundations of the sublime. "Soviet civilization," a.k.a. communism, was a great conservative force. The cultural policies of communist regimes embalmed the old, hierarchical notions of achievement, seeking to confer a noble pedigree on propagandistic banalities. In contrast, capitalism has a truly radical relation to culture, dismantling the very notion of greatness in the arts, which is now most successfully dismissed, by the ecumenical philistinism of both cultural progressives and cultural reactionaries, as an "elitist" presumption.

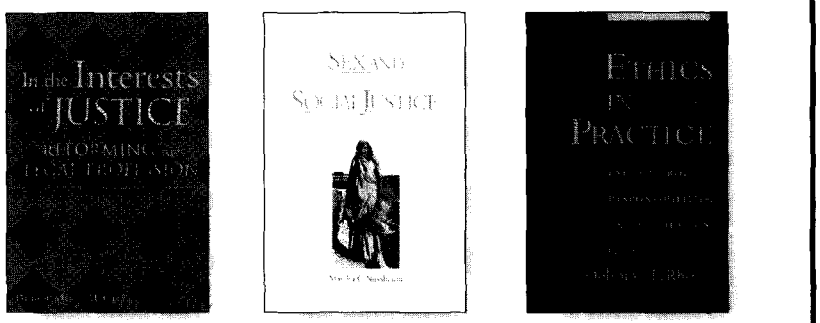
Zagajewski's protest against the collapse of standards has nothing analytical about it. Yet surely he understands the futility (and the indignity) of simply denouncing the collapse. Orphaned pieties overheat sometimes: "Without poetry, we'd hardly be better than the mammals." And many passages assert a familiar dismay, especially when he succumbs to the temptation to see our era as uniquely degraded. What, he inquires rhetorically, would "the great, innocent artists of the past, Giotto or van Eyck, Proust or Apollinaire, have done if some spiteful demon had set them down in our flawed and tawdry world?" Don't know about Giotto or van Eyck; but Proust (d. 1922) and Apollinaire (d. 1918) *innocent*? I should have thought the Europe in which that colossal, senseless slaughter called World War I took place was, if anything, a good deal worse than "flawed and tawdry."

The idea of art as the beleaguered vehicle of spiritual values in a secular age should not have been left unexamined. Still, Zagajewski's utter absence of rancor and vindictiveness, his generosity of spirit, his awareness of the vulgarity of unremitting complaint and of the self-righteous assumption of one's own cultural superiority, mark off his stance from that of the usual tribe of professional mourners of the Death of High Culture, from the *New Criterion* gang to the ever portentous George Steiner. (Once in a while Zagajewski slips into facile pieties about the superiority of the past over the present, but even then he is never grandiose or self-aggrandizing: call it Steinerism with a human face.)

Inveterately prescriptive, occasionally sententious, Zagajewski is too shrewd, too respectful of common or ordinary wisdom, not to see the limits of each of the positions that surround and make sense out of his abiding passions. One *can* be elevated, deepened, improved by works of art. But, Zagajewski cautions, the imagination can become one of its own enemies "if it loses sight of the solid world that cannot be dissolved in art."

Since his book is notational, juxtapositional, it is possible for Zagajewski to entertain quite contradictory assessments. What is valuable is how divided Zagajewski is, as he himself acknowledges. The reflections and the stories in *Another Beauty* show us a subtle, important mind divided between the public world and the claims of art; between solidarity and solitude; between the original "two cities," the Human City and the City of God.

Divided, but not overthrown. There is anguish, but then serenity keeps breaking through. There is desolation, and there are as well the many fortifying pleasures supplied by the genius of others. There is scorn, until *caritas* chimes in. There is despair, but there is, just as inexorably, consolation. ■



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Science Attacks Amazon Tribe

By DAVID STOLL

Darkness in El Dorado: How Scientists and Journalists Devastated the Amazon by Patrick Tierney

(W.W. Norton, 417 pp., $27.95)

LAST FALL THE American Anthropological Association braced for the ugliest scandal in its history. *The New Yorker* was about to excerpt, and W. W. Norton was about to publish, a book that would tell a "nightmarish story—a real anthropological heart of darkness beyond the imagining of even a Josef Conrad (though not, perhaps, a Josef Mengele)." The warning came from two anthropologists, Terence Turner and Leslie Sponsel, who had seen the galleys of a book called *Darkness in El Dorado: How Scientists and Journalists Devastated the Amazon.* Now it was anthropology's turn to be devastated. According to the journalist Patrick Tierney, a well-known member of the profession had been involved in a eugenics experiment in the South American jungle. Mistah Kurtz had been reborn as Professor Napoleon Chagnon of the University of California at Santa Barbara, a world authority on native Amazonians. The Mengele for whom he worked was James Neel of the University of Michigan, a medical doctor, a pioneer geneticist, and a member of the National Academy of Sciences.

Thirty years earlier, in 1968, Chagnon served as the anthropological point man for Neel's expedition into a primitive Venezuelan tribe. The sponsor was the Atomic Energy Commission, which wanted to know how radiation had mutated the genes of the victims of Hiroshima. In the Yanomami Indians, the AEC saw an uncontaminated control group. But that was not the only agenda, according to the new book, because Neel was a eugenicist who wanted to study natural selection in an isolated population. It was for this reason, apparently, that he and Chagnon had inoculated the Yanomami with an obsolete and dangerous measles vaccine, Edmonston B, which backfired and spread the very disease that it was supposed to fight.

Neel then failed to treat some victims, apparently to set up a control group, again with catastrophic results. In "sheer criminality and corruption," Turner and Sponsel warned, Tierney's revelations were without precedent. They would put "the whole discipline on trial." And that was precisely what happened when their memo reached the press, generating headlines such as "Scientists Infected Amazon Indians," "What Happens When Genocide Poses as Science," and, inevitably, "Tribal Warfare Breaks Out in Anthropologists' Ranks."

Soon Turner, Sponsel, and Tierney were being accused of a hoax. James Neel had died six months before, but colleagues obtained Tierney's galley proofs and poked holes in his heavily footnoted argument. According to epidemiologists, Neel could not have infected the Yanomami with measles, because the kind of vaccine that he administered has never been shown to communicate the disease, only its symptoms. Well before Neel's arrival in the Upper Orinoco, measles had broken out, which was why he brought the vaccine: to fight an epidemic that exploded around him.

Fighting off panic, surrounded by the sick and the dying, Neel's team inoculated enough Yanomami to reduce the usual death rate from disasters of this nature. It was true that, in exchange for the machetes and the axes that the Yanomami craved, Neel extracted thousands of blood, urine, stool, and saliva samples, in a way that might not be allowed today. It was also true that Neel worried about the health of the gene pool; he was a geneticist. But he had a long record of opposing controls on who reproduced with whom. As for the idea that he planned the vaccinations as an experiment, this was an inference based on conspiracy theory and a misunderstanding of medical protocols.

By the time Tierney's book appeared, the genocidal medical experiment was just a big misunderstanding. According to Turner and Sponsel, they had not intended to endorse Tierney's allegations, only to warn of the impending scandal. They were indignant that their confidential e-mail message had been forwarded to the rest of the universe. Tierney felt equally injured: he had only raised the possibility that Neel exacerbated the measles epidemic and was conducting an experiment to test eugenicist theories. He was not responsible for the inflammatory language used by the two anthropologists providing the back-cover endorsements for his book. The publisher delayed publication, Tierney revised his galleys, and *The New Yorker* cautiously subtitled its excerpt "Did Napoleon Chagnon's expeditions harm one of the world's most vulnerable tribes?" In Tierney's carefully chosen words: "Today, scientists still do not know whether people who have been vaccinated with Edmonston B can transmit measles"—just as scientists still do not know whether Patrick Tierney is from Mars.

THE COLLAPSE OF the headline accusation notwithstanding, Tierney's book asks important questions. Did the very process of studying the Yanomami take the lives of many of them? What happened to them after the researchers and the film crews went home? Were scientists so busy making their careers that they left behind sick and dying subjects without medical treatment? The Yanomami have been a fixture in the anthropological pantheon for thirty years. When Napoleon Chagnon began fieldwork in 1964, they were a little-known population of 20,000 in the headwaters of the Orinoco and the Amazon between Venezuela and Brazil. Most were still lords unto themselves. Their clothes consisted of a cotton waistband for women and a penis string for men. They greeted visitors with drawn bows, engaged in ritual combats, and blew hallucinogenic snuff up each other's noses. They lived in ring-shaped communal dwellings and often seemed to be at war with each other.

Chagnon was followed by many other researchers, but none matched his production of data, which included an unprecedented series of ethnographic films with the director Timothy Asch; and none matched his book sales, mainly to undergraduates taking anthropology courses. With more than one million copies in print, *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* is a comprehensive ethnography of the kind that few anthropologists attempt anymore, that describes an entire way of life. It is also an adventure story in which

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Chagnon matches wits with stone-age warriors and, through a combination of handouts and heroism, wins the respect of some and the enmity of others:

> In just a few moments I was to meet my first Yanomamo..., my first primitive man. What would he be like? I had visions of entering the village and seeing 125 social facts running about altruistically calling each other kinship terms and sharing food, each waiting and anxious to have me collect his genealogy.... Would they like me? This was important to me; I wanted them to be so fond of me that they would adopt me into their kinship system and way of life.... I looked up and gasped when I saw a dozen burly, naked, sweaty, hideous men staring at us down the shafts of their drawn arrows! Immense wads of green tobacco were stuck between their lower teeth and lips making them look even more hideous, and strands of dark-green slime dripped or hung from their nostrils....

More than anyone else, Chagnon brought the Yanomami to the attention of the world. For this, he deserves some of the credit for the international pressure that has forced the Brazilian and Venezuelan governments to take protective measures. Regrettably, the cost of being discovered is still very high. The naked rainforest Indians who appeal to television audiences as primeval innocents are, to prospectors and other intruders, dangerous savages. Their vulnerability to imported diseases is long term: survivors of the first epidemics continue succumbing to malaria, tuberculosis, and other contagious diseases at elevated rates. Few in number compared with colonizers, they depend on international publicity, on the whims of national opinion, and on the shifting moods of government to defend themselves. Anthropologists have often played the role of whistle-blower, and admiring journalists have directed themselves against the indicated target, such as missionaries.

NOT PATRICK TIERNEY: he shows that it is not just military expeditions, missions, and gold rushes that kill rainforest Indians. Ph.D.'s can kill, too, which he demonstrates through the case of Napoleon Chagnon. Nor is he merely pointing out that accidents do happen. If Tierney is to be believed, Chagnon is a prevaricating monster who bears moral responsibility for the deaths of hundreds of Yanomami in contact epidemics; who, with the trade goods that he used to buy information, set off wars between his subjects; who doctored his data to disguise the true source of Yanomami violence—himself; and who fended off a small army of critics by trying to set up a jungle research empire in league with corrupt Venezuelans. Even the famous ethnographic films that Chagnon helped to make are, in Tierney's account, staged creations that led to more disease and death for the Yanomami. Judging from *Darkness in El Dorado*, Chagnon is to blame for just about everything—even military coups, because the unease over his activities "created concentric circles of violence, starting among the least-contacted Yanomami villages and spreading to Venezuelan national politics, where it culminated in a failed putsch, led by tanks and attack planes, against the presidential palace."

What do anthropologists think of all this? That's where the fun begins. Some are angry with Tierney and his promoters, the unfortunate Turner and Sponsel, for scapegoating an honorable man. Others are peeved with the same trio for botching their case, because Chagnon was already a pariah in cultural anthropology. Perhaps his only rival in this regard is Derek Freeman, who embarrassed the profession by refuting one of its canonical works, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, Margaret Mead's portrait of carefree sex in the South Seas. Not coincidentally, Freeman and Chagnon belong to the minority of sociocultural anthropologists who believe the discipline should be a science, which tests hypotheses with verifiable evidence.

In practice, anthropological fieldwork is so dependent on you-had-to-be-there judgment that hostile camps have come to accuse each other of being "positivists" or "anti-science." But the real reason that Freeman and Chagnon became anathema to their profession is that they are also sociobiologists. They argue that human aggression is not just the result of cultural conditioning, but is inherited from our ape ancestors through natural selection. Chagnon became a star in sociobiology when he reported a spectacular finding: that Yanomami men who killed had twice as many wives and three times as many offspring as those who did not kill.

In cultural anthropology, most of Chagnon's colleagues shrugged: how could a species-wide biological endowment explain the amazing range of behavior shaped by culture? If sociobiology was just another chapter in the nature/nurture saga, it might not generate much invective. Unfortunately, biological explanations for violence tend to be picked up by the political right, prompting counter-accusations that sociobiologists are racists, fascists, or eugenicists—a form of overkill in which Tierney indulges with his references to Chagnon and Neel's "philosophical embrace of violence" and

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their supposedly reactionary politics.

Still, Chagnon's work became a battleground for good reasons. The naked warriors in his films were seductive advertisements for sociobiological assumptions. Yet anthropologists who followed him into the Yanomami rejected his depiction of them as "the fierce people." They were certainly a warrior society, but most local groups did far less raiding than the ones that Chagnon studied. Indeed, some had done little or no raiding for generations, and most Amazon specialists disagree that Yanomami who kill have such a large reproductive advantage.

THEN THERE WAS the question of Chagnon's personality, which could fairly be described as Napoleonic. (He was named after a French-Canadian grandfather.) Judging from his ability to learn a difficult language, write a compelling book, and make powerful films, he was doing anthropology better than just about anyone else, which he was not shy about expressing. Perhaps doing fieldwork with the Yanomani required a tough character, but how had Chagnon's blunt, overbearing ways affected his perception of his subjects? When other ethnographers found the Yanomami less warlike than he had, the suspicion grew that he had projected his own confrontational tendencies onto them.

In the words of John Cook, who as a student fell under the spell of "the fierce people," Chagnon embodied a chest-beating anthropology that glamorized the "dirty, complex, morally and politically perilous process" of fieldwork. While the rest of the profession became preoccupied with epistemological and moral dilemmas, Chagnon made no apologies for testing his manhood against Amazonian warriors. As the field changed, he came to represent an earlier, more adventurous era, when a rugged location counted for more than a fluency in post-structuralism. Like James Neel, he was a tough research entrepreneur with a compulsive attitude toward extracting data. As anthropology became more introspective, it became easy to accuse such a researcher of insensitivity toward his subjects. Chagnon was all the easier to indict as a swaggering brute because, unlike anthropologists who claim to be self-critical but bury their contradictions under six feet of theory, he wrote an entire book about his methodology.

What blindsided Chagnon was the pathogen-loaded steel axe, and all the desire and the death that could be carried in such a simple utilitarian object. If any part of Tierney's book holds up to the scrutiny that it deserves, this will be it: the fatal attraction of the Yanomami to the trade goods that Chagnon offered. For people who have been trying to chop down tropical forest with stone axes, it is hard to exaggerate the appeal of steel. Since the Yanomami must clear jungle to keep from starving, it has become a matter of life and death for them to obtain steel axes and machetes.

CHAGNON TOOK YANOMAMI men at face value when they said they fought over women, but the usual explanation for primitive warfare is competition for natural resources or trade routes. This is how Brian Ferguson reinterpreted Chagnon's data in 1995 in his ethno-history *Yanomami Warfare*: to show that most of their wars on record have been set off by the introduction of steel tools and diseases, not by competition for women. Ferguson also concluded that Chagnon became a "wild card" in local politics and had "a major impact" on the Yanomami around him, to the point of inadvertently setting off hostilities. Yet Ferguson was careful to note that Chagnon was the only outsider who had recorded his activities in enough detail to make it possible to blame him. While missionaries had handed out larger quantities of goods, they had not left the records necessary to document the consequences.

Still, if Yanomami killed each other to monopolize the suppliers of steel tools, it was not just the missionaries who were responsible. Chagnon's advance work for the Atomic Energy Commission required handing out more machetes, axes, and cooking pots than anyone else in the history of anthropology. His belief that the Yanomami fight over women made it harder for him to see the repercussions of what he was doing; but then Ferguson assembled the evidence that the Yanomami fight over trade goods, and now Tierney shows that they fight over anthropologists. Turning Chagnon's own confident accounts against him, Tierney shows how his gifts sent Yanomami on raids and how his expeditions delivered pathogens deeper into Yanomami territory. Never have I seen more sickening bar graphs than the ones that Tierney derives from Chagnon's data. They show sharp upswings in Yanomami homicides and epidemic mortality following the arrival of missionaries and researchers.

From 1987 to 1990, tens of thousands of Brazilian gold miners invaded the tribe. An estimated fifteen hundred Yanomami died from contagions. In Brazil, the mining lobby tried to fragment a new Yanomami reserve into an archipelago of separate territories, arguing that otherwise they would exterminate each other. Brazilian anthropologists denounced Chagnon for turning the Yanomami into a scientific archetype for ferocity, which presumably had made it easier to justify grabbing their land. Whether or not Brazilian colonists required sociobiology to justify their activities, Chagnon dropped "the fierce people" from his book title.

CHAGNON'S PROBLEMS IN Venezuela had begun earlier. Objections to the AEC's intrusive research, along with resentment of Chagnon's funding, accomplishments, and behavior, had blocked research permits for a decade. By 1990 he was so unpopular with Venezuelan universities, anthropologists, and the more visible Yanomami leaders that he had no choice but to make amends with an estranged research partner, the Venezuelan naturalist and strip miner Charles Brewer Carías. Charlie Brewer was a symbol of his country's "Conquest of the South," and getting back together with him seems to have been Chagnon's biggest mistake.

Brewer had been the first to interest Neel and Chagnon in the Yanomami in the early 1960s. Before then, Neel had been planning to send his research teams to the Kayapo in Brazil, another warrior people who have since become the research domain of Chagnon's arch-critic Terry Turner. Oh, what might have been! On the expedition in 1968, Brewer served as dentist, but that was just one of his many skills. Others were photographing the soaring jungle mesas around Angel Falls, lecturing for the New York Botanical Garden, and inventing the Brewer Explorer Survival Knife. In Caracas he became minister of youth, in which capacity he recruited gang members to start a border war with Guyana. He also organized gold-mining ventures, adapted water-jet technology to industrial-scale mining, and turned some of the same lost-world landscapes that he had explored into what Tierney calls "mud soup."

Chagnon was among Brewer's many critics. But by now Chagnon was so unpopular with Venezuelan anthropologists that it was only Brewer who could get him research permits, through the latter's connection to Cecilia Matos, the mistress of President Carlos Andrés Pérez. Matos presided over a foundation to help Indians, and was accustomed to commandeer helicopters from the armed forces and descend upon Yanomami villages. Thanks to Brewer and Matos, Chagnon was able to return to the Yanomami, but on terms chronicled unforgivingly by Tierney, and also on terms that antagonized the Venezuelan military, which resented ferrying around the president's girlfriend and her foreign guests.

When indictments for corruption sent Pérez to prison, Matos left the country, and she is still a fugitive from justice. And

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just as the graft investigations widened to Brewer and his plans for protected rainforest, an interim president appointed him and Chagnon to the commission in charge of the new Yanomami biosphere. Presumably Charlie Brewer's task was to protect the Yanomami from rapacious mining interests, and Napoleon Chagnon would protect them from unethical researchers. Among the many who objected to this arrangement was a powerful Catholic mission, run by the Salesian order from Italy, to whom the Venezuelan government had long entrusted the Yanomami. There was a national outcry.

Chagnon's appointment ended in a jungle clearing on September 30, 1993, when a Catholic bishop, a colonel, and a judge expelled him from the country. Banishment is the usual price for losing a patronage battle over rainforest Indians, but Chagnon did not concede graciously. In *The New York Times* and the *Times Literary Supplement*, he accused the Salesians, with whom he had long cooperated, of being careless about epidemics, and of handing out shotguns that men used to kill each other. Soon the Salesians and the Yanomami near their missions were accusing him of similar offenses.

PATRICK TIERNEY HAD been visiting the Yanomami since 1989, but over in Brazil. For the purpose of investigation, he accompanied gold miners on their incursions and became involved in indigenous rights campaigns. At one point Viking sent out advance copies of a book called *Last Tribes of El Dorado: The Gold Wars in the Amazon Rainforest*, but it never reached the bookstores. Perhaps Tierney realized that the mining invasions had become an old story.

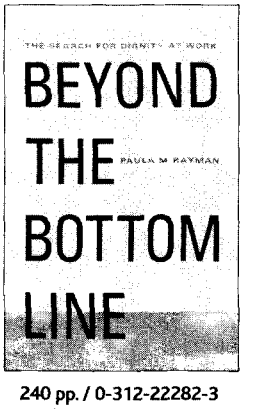
Despite the bitter feuds among anthropologists and missionaries, they and their agitator friends had pressured the Venezuelan and Brazilian governments into setting up substantial reserves for the Yanomami. The miners had been kicked out, at least for the time being. Chagnon was washed up politically, with little chance of returning to the field, but he was still arrogant and unrepentant, and he would be a provocative addition to the usual parade of villains. Pulling together the many criticisms of Chagnon's work, Tierney went a step further and sought to show that the super-ethnographer was the main cause of the violence that he had reported.

Chagnon blamed his troubles on Salesian missionaries, on anthropologists enamored of the noble savage, and on indigenous rights organizations such as Survival International, which had joined the clamor to block his research permits. But the underlying problem, Tierney contends, was that Chagnon had alienated the Yanomami. One reason was his tireless extraction of Yanomami genealogies, which required persuading his informants to break taboos against using personal names. Quoting Chagnon's own explanations of how he took advantage of tribal schisms to gather names, Tierney accuses him of provoking further hostilities. According to Chagnon, his candor about early mistakes is being misinterpreted as a statement of preferred methodology. Even if asking Yanomami about this subject requires delicacy, ethnographers who disagree with Chagnon have managed to collect genealogies without anyone getting too upset about it. Since even the Salesians had a collaborative genealogy project with Chagnon, I suspect that Tierney makes more of this problem than it deserves.

The second reason that the Yanomami turned against Chagnon, according to Tierney, was the ethnographic films and their epidemiological consequences. To shoot strong footage, Chagnon and his partner Asch had to bring distrustful Yanomami groups together for volatile alliance feasts. If these gatherings were successful, Tierney claims, the predictable outcome was a raid against a third Yanomami group. And another predictable outcome was an epidemic brought in by the film crew.

Chagnon is certainly not responsible for every bug that hit a vulnerable population. He brought more medical aid than most researchers do, and he should not be blamed for missionary and governmental breakdowns. Still, under pressure from the AEC's complex and expensive research agenda, he failed to take precautions that could have saved lives. According to Tierney:

> With sickness raging at the mission stations, there should have been an absolute ban on travel to the inland villages except for express emergency relief. But the widespread sickness was also related to the frenetic pace of scientific research in 1971. During this year, Chagnon gathered blood at more than a dozen villages on the Ocamo River alone, made first contact with another huge village on the upper Mavaca (where he also collected blood), and shot sixteen miles of film at Mishimishimabowei-teri. He kept traveling through the malaria and cold epidemics sweeping the mission bases, picking up guides, paying everyone in steel, and never stopping for quarantine controls. Sometimes he had to travel at full throttle at night. He couldn't stop. This was the year Neel sent more geneticists into the field than ever before—three complete expeditions.... In this



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way, the worst epidemics to hit the upper Orinoco coincided with the AEC's two most productive years, 1968 and 1971.

SO DO THE Yanomami really hate the anthropologist who made them famous? Some of them do. In one of Tierney's opening scenes, only an agile Charlie Brewer saves Chagnon from having an axe buried in his head. By the early 1990s, Yanomami working with the Salesians and Yanomami working with Chagnon and his allies were killing each other in a trade war, not for the first time. César Dimanawa, a Chagnon guide who turned against him and became president of the Catholic-affiliated trading cooperative, ran his own shotgun-toting death squad. Earlier there was a war between Chagnon's village and the village of the French anthropologist Jacques Lizot, a Salesian ally who is accused of using his own bountiful supply of trade goods to create a male harem.

If even a small number of the accusations being thrown around are true, just about everyone involved with the Yanomami shares responsibility for a catastrophe that has yet to end. The survivors can be forgiven for wanting to blame someone. Missionaries are obvious candidates, but they have often become the most reliable allies for vulnerable groups such as this one, if only because they do not have to get back to California for the fall semester. The Venezuelan and Brazilian governments are an even more obvious choice, but they cannot be expelled. So for the time being, many Yanomami have settled upon Chagnon, whose denunciation firms up their problematic relationships with other outsiders.

Tierney's genealogy of evil stretching back to the Atomic Energy Commission allows him to sidestep some difficult issues. His book suggests that Western science has been a net loss for the Yanomami and other vulnerable groups. He could be right: in the debate over the Human Genome Project, critics have plausibly pointed out that corporations are far more likely to benefit than the indigenous groups being harvested. The same can be said of corporate drug-testing on Third World populations. What have the Yanomami received in return for being studied so intensively? "We are tired of being constantly investigated, of them taking our blood and using us as little animals," a Yanomami leader complained.

But as Chagnon's colleagues Kim Hill and Magdalena Hurtado have observed, pulling the Yanomami through epidemics is not merely a question of vaccinating them on time. Exactly why such groups are so vulnerable is not a simple matter; and protecting them from ravages such as drug-resistant tuberculosis requires medical research of the kind that, thanks to the kind of headlines generated by Tierney's book, is easily interpreted as a genocidal conspiracy. Careless journalism that increases suspicion of vaccination campaigns could take many more lives than the kind of errors that Tierney reports, as suggested by the impact of HIV debates on vaccination campaigns in Africa.

Conspiracy theories also make a perfect rationale for nationalist reactions by Latin American governments. By deciding that the most important story is "how scientists and journalists devastated the Amazon," Tierney implies that the solution is more supervision by governments, whose long history of neglect he mentions only incidentally. Pointing the finger at foreign researchers and missionaries is a familiar drill for Creole elites who themselves have much for which to answer. In Venezuela, the indigenous affairs department reacted to Tierney's charges by declaring a moratorium on all foreign research in indigenous areas. "How is it," asked a Venezuelan congresswoman, "that despite the presence of so many scientists in indigenous communities, the Indians are sinking deeper and deeper into extreme poverty, and diseases like malaria and tuberculosis are more and more common?" Tribal leaders are asking the same question about the Venezuelan government, which has failed to deliver promised medical care. According to Yanomami leaders, twelve of their people have died from respiratory diseases since October 2000 owing to official negligence, including the dispatch of expired vaccines.

TO SURVIVE ANOTHER generation, people like the Yanomami must be able to appeal to national and international opinion, but hyping their cause without hurting it may be impossible. Tierney's account of a non-Chagnon film expedition, by the BBC/Nova team that shot *Warriors of the Amazon* in 1993, is symptomatic. Of the ninety Yanomami being filmed, four expired during the process, including a mother and infant whose slow death the crew recorded over a week. While the crew was able to fly in a replacement camera from London, it was not able to send the mother an hour downriver to a mission infirmary. Tierney sees a basic contradiction here, between human decency and the crew's need for death-in-the-jungle footage, and he is right.

Another problem is that any footage that is sufficiently savage to interest television viewers will, sooner or later, deeply embarrass the people so depicted. Once Yanomami wish to be accepted as peaceful, clothed citizens, they find it harder to view the Chagnon-Asch films as a contribution to their cause. All in all, Tierney has convinced me that ethnographic filmmaking is a bad idea, so I am looking forward to the *National Geographic* special that he happens to have in the works, on human sacrifice in the Andes.

SINCE THE IDEA of leaving the Yanomami alone has dwindled to a pipe dream, helping them requires a combination of sensitivity and muscularity that no one has so far mastered. Ironically, just a few years ago, the American Anthropological Association jettisoned its procedures for judging ethics violations. Unlike the legal and medical associations, it does not license members, and it can do little to punish them. Since the complaints received by the ethics committee consisted mainly of anthropologists accusing each other of plagiarism, it decided to focus on educating them about broader issues.

Now, thanks to Tierney's book, the ethics committee is drafting guidelines on how to do fieldwork, including when anthropologists should take responsibility for medical assistance, how they are to compensate their informants, and how they are to obtain informed consent. Still, some dilemmas will never be resolved by guidelines. Any researcher working in Third World conditions can prevent people from dying: by personally taking them to hospitals, by pressuring the staff into attending them, by buying medicine and other essentials, and, not infrequently, by persuading relatives to invest scarce resources in what they regard as a hopeless case. Of course, doing all these things may not leave much time for research—or for investigative journalism.

Requiring investigators to obtain informed consent from the people whom they study is another necessary step that, while being codified in increasing detail to govern research on human subjects, can be impossible to obtain in a meaningful sense. If most Yanomami had no conception of the larger world thirty years ago, how could Chagnon have explained even a better designed, less exploitative AEC project to them? What if, by forcing Western medicine on unwilling subjects, researchers can help them to survive threats that they barely comprehend?

As for how to compensate the Yanomami for being studied, what they seem to want are more of the same trade goods that aggravated rivalries and led to many deaths. The most coveted item is still the shotgun. One of Tierney's most memorable passages is about the cargo cult that he encountered among the most remote Yanomami groups. To attract helicopters carrying steel tools,

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they were cutting out landing pads, even though they now realized that Western machinery brings deathly disease. "Americanos land here—boom. Caraca-teri land—boom. Brazileros—boom," shamans called to the helicopters, hoping to entice them down from the sky. Once the foreigners unloaded their presents, the Yanomami planned to scare them away before they left the next contagion. ■

For the Benefit of Mr. Kite

By ALAN TAYLOR

The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin by H.W. Brands

(Doubleday, 768 pp., $35)

TODAY WE KNOW Benjamin Franklin mainly from an old advertising image: an elderly man in knickers, long coat, and spectacles, with a bald crown and long hair—a zealot foolishly determined to fly a kite during a thunderstorm. This Franklin appears eccentric, comic, antiquated, and harmless (except to himself). He no longer arouses either controversy or adulation—merely laughter. We only dimly sense his importance in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the paragon of, and the pattern for, American middle-class values. For many generations of Americans studied Franklin's aphorisms, first published in 1732 in his *Poor Richard's Almanac*: "early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise" and so on. And they admired his autobiography, which revealed his economic rise by means of thrift, labor, moderation, and reason.

By becoming the creed of the ambitious and the successful, however, Franklin's sayings also inspired the animus of critics appalled by the materialism of American culture. Since he has now lost his standing as a moral model, we may find it hard to comprehend D. H. Lawrence's rage at Franklin, whom Lawrence considered the prime example of the self-repressed and self-satisfied philistine, pinching spontaneity as well as pennies—the very font of Babbittry. And it is only slightly easier for modern readers to get the joke in Mark Twain's satire of Franklin as a pedagogical killjoy imposed by stern fathers on "boys who might otherwise have been happy." Twain mused that "he had a fashion of living wholly on bread and water, and studying astronomy at mealtimes—a thing which has brought affliction to millions of boys since, whose fathers had read Franklin's pernicious [auto]biography." Rarely read now by children or parents, Franklin's autobiography belongs primarily to college students, assigned as a way into a lost culture rather than as a guide to life.

Having winnowed Franklin down to a kite-flying fool, we are ill-prepared to see that the moralizing figure of past centuries was already a truncation of a complex, contradictory, and controversial genius. In his clear and sprightly biography, H.W. Brands partially recovers the actual Franklin who lived—before his memory became a bourgeois icon and was later, like all icons, trivialized. Brands practices popular history: light on analysis but rich in the description of settings, personalities, and action. Dispensing with scholarly debates, he offers instead a succession of amusing anecdotes and vivid tales. This sentence, about the 1730s, is typical: "Meanwhile an insidious rationalism—the work of Newton and the other apostles of the Enlightenment—had driven the center of religious gravity from the bowels of believers up toward their brains." *The First American* will have little influence among academic historians, but it offers a lively re-introduction of Franklin to thousands of citizens—just the sort of good deed that Brands's subject practiced and preached.

ALAN TAYLOR is professor of American history at the University of California at Davis. He is the author of *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (Knopf).

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Minimizing any dark shadings, Brands offers an affectionate—indeed, an indulgent—portrait of a great and good man. As he explains: "Franklin's story is the story of a man—an exceedingly gifted man and a most engaging one. It is also the story of the birth of America—an America this man discovered in himself, then helped create in the world at large." But finally Brands's book is too light. We are presented with Franklin's world and actions, but without a psychological purchase on what made him so forceful and so controversial. Depicted as almost always sunny and thoughtful, Brands's Franklin is a tad shallow: "While others agonized upon life's deep issues, Franklin contented himself with incomplete answers, maintaining an open mind and seeming to skate upon life's surfaces." So, too, does Brands, who rarely attends to the inner contradictions, conflicts, or repressions that might have driven Franklin and perhaps earned him at least a few of his enemies.

THE BOOK'S TITLE hints at Brands's double understanding of Franklin as the "first American." Franklin, in his account, was both the foremost colonist of his generation and the earliest to embrace a national identity distinct from Europe and a politics independent of the British empire. The case for Brands's first sense of Franklin's priority is far stronger than the case for the second. Until Franklin was eclipsed by George Washington after 1776, no American achieved greater renown and influence.

A self-educated polymath endowed with formidable charm and considerable intellect, Franklin quickly became the leading figure in colonial politics, literature, science, and social reform. Born in 1706 into the modest circumstances of an artisanal family in the stagnating seaport of Boston, Franklin bolted from an early apprenticeship at his brother's newspaper and, with impeccable timing, moved south to Philadelphia, which was just then becoming the most dynamic seaport city in the colonies. By dint of hard work, great abilities, and useful friends, Franklin developed a lucrative newspaper and an almanac that combined wit and moralism (no easy task). His impact on American culture was immense and long-lasting. But Franklin's greatest creation may have been himself: the first self-made man as public celebrity, still a powerful and pivotal type in our culture.

Franklin profited in particular as a publisher and promoter for the controversial evangelist George Whitefield. Provoking mass emotional outbursts, Whitefield's preaching spread the revivals of the Great Awakening. Although Franklin was a religious skeptic, he admired Whitefield's promotional talents and moral effectiveness. By publicizing Whitefield's sensational tour, and by publishing his sermons and journals, Franklin helped spread the Great Awakening through the northern and middle colonies. Of course, Franklin profited handsomely from selling Whitefield's works.

A clever writer as well as an astute businessman, Franklin also developed in his newspapers and his almanac a cast of comic characters that opened an enduring vein for American humor. Silence Dogood, Poor Richard Saunders, and Polly Baker appear as disarming plain folk, the better to convey wicked insights into the follies of social conventions and the pretensions of the pompous elite. Facing her fifth conviction for bearing an illegitimate child, Polly Baker challenged the double standard that allowed her first seducer to escape punishment and proceed to flourish as her judge. Citing her biblical duty to increase and multiply, she concluded: "for its sake, I have hazarded the loss of the public esteem, and have frequently endured public disgrace and punishment; and therefore ought, in my humble opinion, instead of a whipping, to have a statue erected to my memory." A long line of humorists—from Davy Crockett and Mark Twain to Garrison Keillor—still rework the prototypes created by Franklin.

ONCE FRANKLIN ACCUMULATED wealth, he gradually retired from business, entrusting his press to a junior partner. And then, freed from daily commerce, Franklin remade himself again, this time as a public-spirited gentleman. Brands observes:

> In the two centuries after his death Franklin would be cited—in praise by some, in scorn by others—as a prototype of the American capitalist. The citation was misleading. Had Franklin possessed the soul of a true capitalist, he would have devoted the time he saved from printing to making money somewhere else. But he did not. For Franklin the getting of money was always a means to an end, never the end itself.

During the 1730s and 1740s, Franklin helped to found and to lead an array of cultural and philanthropic institutions: the Library Company, the American Philosophical Society, the "Publick Academy of Philadelphia" (which later became the University of Pennsylvania), and a network of volunteer fire companies. Within the British empire, these institutions rendered Philadelphia third only to London and Edinburgh in intellectual activity.

As is well known, Franklin also conducted scientific experiments, primarily with electricity, demonstrating that it produced lightning and could be harnessed to electrocute chickens and turkeys. Published in London and Paris, his scientific reports dazzled European intellectuals and brought him fame overseas. A utilitarian at heart, Franklin also applied science to craft inventions meant to improve daily life: a lightning rod to protect buildings and a stove to heat them.

AS A PUBLIC-SPIRITED gentleman, Franklin inevitably plunged into politics, becoming the preeminent politician in Pennsylvania's colonial assembly. Although a weak orator, Franklin could mesmerize individuals and small gatherings with amusing conversation and insightful stories. A fellow politician later remarked, "He is no speaker.... He is, however, a most extraordinary man, and tells a story in a style more engaging than anything I ever heard." In his skill for telling stories to make a political point lightly, Franklin anticipated the art of Lincoln.

By energizing the Pennsylvania assembly, Franklin antagonized the colony's English proprietor—Thomas Penn, the choleric son of the saintly founder William Penn. Determined to preserve his vast landholdings from taxation, Thomas Penn directed his appointed governor to veto tax bills that funded frontier defenses. The assembly then sent Franklin to London to lobby Penn. When that failed, Franklin lingered, pressing the imperial bureaucracy to repossess Pennsylvania as a royal colony with a Crown-appointed governor. Foiled a second time, Franklin stayed on to represent the assemblies of Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Massachusetts in arguing against the new British program of colonial taxes and stricter regulations. Frustrated yet again, Franklin headed back to Philadelphia, arriving in early 1775 ready to assist the armed revolution against British rule.

Elected by Pennsylvania to the Continental Congress, Franklin took the lead in framing the rebels' foreign initiatives. In 1777, he left for Paris to seek French military assistance and alliance against their common enemy, the British empire. Persistent, tactful, and engaging, Franklin dazzled French society and won the alliance that proved essential to the Americans' military victory. Then, in 1782–1783, Franklin led the American commission that negotiated an extraordinarily favorable peace treaty with the British.

In 1785 Franklin returned home in triumph, but did not yet seek the quiet retirement that he claimed to covet. He won election and re-election as the "president" of Pennsylvania's executive council (the closest thing to a governor under the

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state's Revolutionary constitution). In 1787 he also represented his state in the convention that met in Philadelphia to draft a new national constitution for the American union. Slowed by age, Franklin played a minimal role in the convention, but did suggest the pivotal compromise that gave the small states equal representation in a Senate while awarding larger delegations in a House of Representatives to the more populous states.

Retiring from politics in 1788, the increasingly infirm Franklin died two years later, at the age of eighty-four. Even in death he created a legacy: his will established a fund to capitalize young and single artisans starting out in business. Having become more legalistic in his old age, Franklin limited the borrowers to those who had "faithfully fulfilled the duties required in their indentures." Through repayment with interest, the loans kept the fund growing over the decades. When it matured in 1990, the bicentennial of his death, the fund bestowed $4.5 million on Boston and $2 million on Philadelphia (which had less successfully managed its half of the legacy).

GIVEN FRANKLIN'S MULTIPLE talents and prodigious accomplishments, Brands aptly depicts him as the eighteenth century's foremost American. But the biographer is far less effective at establishing his second sense of Franklin as "the first American": as the earliest to consider himself no British subject. Indeed, by pushing that point Brands contradicts his more important insight, that Franklin was a belated convert to the radical cause of American independence.

Instead of promoting American separation, Franklin long sought a more integrated and more equal empire that invited colonial leaders into new institutions of imperial rule. Beginning in the late 1730s, Franklin cultivated a political expertise and influence beyond Pennsylvania through his appointment as the empire's postmaster for the American colonies. He also developed a cosmopolitan perspective that transcended the parochialism that limited the politicians of the individual colonies. During the early 1750s, Franklin urged an inter-colonial union under British auspices, the better to defeat the French and to conquer Canada and the Ohio Valley. In Albany in 1754, a convention of colonial delegates endorsed Franklin's plan of union, but their assemblies rejected it, jealously guarding their petty autonomy.

By strengthening transatlantic as well as inter-colonial bonds, Franklin meant to render the empire more powerful and permanent. "I should hope too," he wrote, "that by such an union, the people of Great Britain and the people of the Colonies would learn to consider themselves, not as belonging to different communities with different interests, but to one community with one interest." Practicing what he preached, Franklin exulted in 1760 in the British conquest of Canada "not merely as I am a colonist, but as I am a Briton."

Noting the more rapid population growth of the colonies, Franklin expected that an integrated empire of political equals would, over several generations, gradually and peacefully shift the center of imperial gravity away from London and across the Atlantic to America. In 1760, he explained: "I have long been of opinions that the foundations of the future grandeur and stability of the British Empire lie in America; and though, like other foundations, they are low and little seen, they are nevertheless broad and strong enough to support the greatest political structure human wisdom ever yet erected." Alas, this vision appealed neither to most colonists, who increasingly coveted autonomy, nor to the British, who aspired to tighter control over their empire.

BETWEEN 1757 AND 1774 Franklin spent all but three years in England, making more friends than he retained in the colonies. Smitten by the greater sophistication of London, Franklin repeatedly delayed returning home and contemplated remaining permanently. He also learned how to play the London game of patronage politics. Pride in himself and in his empire reached new heights in 1762, when he secured the appointment of his son William as royal governor of New Jersey. Benjamin also contemplated accepting a rumored position in the imperial bureaucracy as an undersecretary of state for the colonies. And father and son assembled a cartel of colonial and English grandees with political clout to lobby the Crown for a massive land grant involving twenty million acres of fertile land in the Illinois country, then an Indian domain.

Although he opposed the Stamp Tax that was levied on the colonists in 1765, Franklin promptly scrambled to secure for a political ally, John Hughes, the potentially lucrative post of Pennsylvania's collector. Hughes soon regretted that friendship when a protest mob threatened to dismantle his house and his body. From a safe distance in London, Franklin urged Hughes to hang tough: "a firm loyalty to the Crown and faithful adherence to the government of this nation, which is the safety as well as the honour of the colonies to be connected with, will always be the wisest course for you and I to take, whatever may be the madness of the populace or their blind

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leaders, who can only bring themselves and country into trouble, and draw on greater burthens by acts of rebellious tendency." In 1765, Franklin lagged far behind the first Americans.

During the imperial crisis of the 1760s and early 1770s, Franklin faced an impossible balancing act as a colonial agent seeking favors and concessions from Parliament and the Crown. He needed to represent his constituents, who were increasingly restive under British control, yet not alienate the imperial officials who could deliver redress. Preferring compromise to violence, Franklin opposed both the British taxes and the colonial mobs that violently shut down ports and courts and silenced the champions of law and order. Radical violence alienated British public opinion, complicating his efforts to persuade Parliament that the colonists remained loyal subjects warranting concessions rather than punishment. While radicals at home pushed toward virtual autonomy, Franklin fell a beat behind. Late into the 1760s, he continued to press for Pennsylvania's reconstitution as a royal colony more fully integrated into the empire. Trying to be helpful, he opposed the Stamp Tax as provocatively "internal," but suggested that the colonists would accept Parliament's constitutional right to levy "external" taxes, those on imports and exports.

Seizing upon that distinction, Parliament replaced the Stamp Tax with new duties on commerce, only to discover that the colonists did not accept Franklin's formula. That discovery induced both colonial radicals and imperial officials to suspect Franklin of bad faith. Franklin sighed that he was suspected "in England of being too much an American, and in America of being too much an Englishman." Only in January 1774, when the British elite decisively refuted his imperial vision and publicly humiliated him, did Franklin embrace uncompromising resistance to British rule.

But the radicals had decided at least four years earlier that a rupture was unavoidable and would be better provoked than delayed. In this sense, the title of "first American" better fits the Massachusetts cousins Samuel Adams and John Adams or the Virginia brothers Arthur Lee and Richard Henry Lee—all four of them harsh critics of Franklin. Long impatient with his temporizing, they regarded his conversion as opportunistic and insincere. That his son and protégé William Franklin remained loyal to the empire compounded their doubts and Benjamin Franklin's embarrassment.

Throughout the Revolutionary War, the most radical congressmen felt ambivalent toward Franklin. They desperately needed his transatlantic expertise and influence in order to decipher British politics and seek a French alliance. Yet leading congressmen and fellow diplomats eyed his every move with a deep suspicion that he might sell out their new country to the British or the French. Only by seeing Franklin as a "late American" rather than "the first American" can we understand the persistent controversies that swirled around his conduct in London and Paris.

ACCOUNTING FOR FRANKLIN'S enemies is the least of Brands's concerns. He dismisses them summarily as cranks immune to Franklin's charm, announcing in the book's prologue that "Franklin's self-effacing style succeeded remarkably; at sixty-eight he had almost no personal enemies and comparatively few political enemies for a man of public affairs." And yet Brands's subsequent pages reveal a steady succession of foes, who often felt a peculiarly intense detestation for Franklin.

As an adolescent in Boston, Franklin began to accumulate both admirers and critics with his satirical writings for his brother's newspaper. He particularly ridiculed the town's leading ministers, riling the celebrated Cotton Mather. Appealing to popular prejudices, the Franklin brothers denounced Mather's enlightened attempt to protect Bostonians from deadly smallpox by introducing the new technique of inoculation. Benjamin Franklin would atone heavily for his early satire in 1736, when his son Francis died of smallpox at age four. At the end of his long life, Franklin recalled that "I long regretted bitterly, and still regret, that I had not given [smallpox] to him by inoculation."

Franklin's departure from his brother's print shop was abrupt, acrimonious, and illegal: only eighteen years old, he still had three years to serve on his contract as an apprentice. Fed up with taking orders from his older brother and father, he fled to Philadelphia. There Franklin easily made new friends, but he also alienated a few who could not serve or keep pace with his growing ambitions. In 1724, Franklin violently quarreled and permanently broke with John Collins, his closest friend, who drank and gambled excessively. The eccentric printer Samuel Keimer hired Franklin, soon developed a distrust of him, and provoked his sudden and acrimonious discharge.

Franklin subsequently went into business with a partner named Hugh Meredith, who provided more capital than ability. Their ending was predictable: once their newspaper succeeded, Franklin found new investors and replaced the disgruntled Meredith. To sell copies of his new almanac, Franklin predicted in print that his chief rival, the almanac writer Titan Leeds, would soon die. When the outraged Leeds refused to cooperate, Franklin depicted him as an imposter, masking the real man's death. The gambit (appropriated from Jonathan Swift) was far more amusing to readers than to Leeds.

In 1737 Franklin helped set up a cruel and ultimately fatal practical joke on Daniel Rees, "a gullible and perhaps mentally impaired apprentice." Exploiting Rees's naïve longing to become a Freemason, some friends of Franklin's

The Ex-Husband

He's pure shrapnel, stored-up venom, a shred of a man,
a sliver, a desperate fighter cut on the lid, blindly
pummeling his opponent before going down, except

he must follow you to your bedroom window
(to see what he's missing). Call it a compulsion, a fetish,
an obsession, his face in the window, the face

of a five-year-old begging you to stare into that wallet
full of need; at the same time you feel the full force of him
like a shove, a shove inside him, a sinkhole or a ditch.

Back there, the shutters have been nailed down
for the thunderstorm, he overturns wicker chairs
searching for that missing toy, the wife who slipped away.

Until the lightning strikes, until he sees her face,
his mother's wagging finger. He wants the she he needs
to stroke his forehead, whispering *there there*, as the storm

is sparking, alternating current: all self, no self, all self.

Ira Sadoff

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staged a phony ceremony mocking him. Accidentally doused in flaming brandy, Rees died in agony two days later. Although Franklin did not attend the initiation and was not prosecuted, he reaped heavy criticism from a rival editor for his prior knowledge of the charade—and his approving laughter at it. "It was hardly Franklin's finest hour," Brands concedes, "and he knew it."

MOVING INTO POLITICS, Franklin accumulated more, and very bitter, enemies. In Pennsylvania he feuded with the governors appointed by Thomas Penn. One governor reported that "I really believe there never will be any prospect of ease or happiness here, while that villain has the liberty of spreading about the poison of that inveterate malice and ill nature, which is so deeply implanted in his own black heart." After moving to London, Franklin tangled directly with Thomas Penn. After one especially contentious conversation, Penn denounced Franklin for "vile misrepresentation" and refused any further contact. Franklin also offended prominent Crown ministers, principally George Grenville, first lord of the Treasury, and Lord Hillsborough, secretary of state for the colonies. The latter killed Franklin's bid for a vast land grant in the Illinois country.

In 1773 and 1774, Franklin alienated almost the entire British elite by sending stolen letters to the Massachusetts radicals to bolster their waning confidence in his allegiance. Written primarily by Thomas Hutchinson, the royal governor of Massachusetts, the letters urged tighter British restrictions on colonial liberties. Franklin exhorted his correspondent, Thomas Cushing, to show the letters only to trusted associates, and by all means to keep them out of the press. But Cushing shared the letters with Samuel Adams, who promptly had them published.

That publication created an uproar—in Massachusetts against Hutchinson, and in Britain against Franklin, who, by dealing in purloined letters, had violated the code of honor expected of gentlemen. The royal Privy Council summoned Franklin to a hearing, where, on January 29, 1774, the acerbic prosecutor Alexander Wedderburn subjected him to an hour of invective, to the great applause and amusement of the lords and a gallery of spectators. Two days later the Crown summarily dismissed Franklin from his office as postmaster general for the colonies. The British newspapers celebrated Wedderburn and denounced Franklin. (From this, Brands concludes that the British were "an arrogant people maliciously led.")

In May 1775, Franklin returned to an America at war with the British empire. Two years later Congress sent Franklin to Paris as a diplomatic commissioner, but provided two fellow commissioners, one the notoriously suspicious Arthur Lee. His complaints to Franklin and his harsh reports to Congress drove Franklin to despair. At last Franklin drafted (but did not send) a rebuke of Lee, expressing "pity for your sick mind, which is forever tormenting itself with jealousies, suspicions and fancies that others mean you ill, wrong you or fail in respect for you. If you do not cure your self of this temper, it will end in insanity." Franklin also abruptly dismissed Lee's suspicions that their secretary, Edward Bancroft, was a British spy. In fact, Bancroft was on the British payroll.

Three years later Congress sent another commissioner, John Adams, who soon came to share most of Lee's suspicions about Franklin, and added a few of his own. Adams regarded Franklin as lazy, dissipated, devious, and too accommodating to French interests, and he privately blamed Franklin for the many disputes in the American delegation: "Franklin's cunning will be to divide us. To this end, he will provoke, he will insinuate, he will intrigue, he will maneuvre."

THIS CATALOGUE OF quarrels and feuds is hardly unusual for a man with a public career as long, as active, and as aggressive as Franklin's. Ambitious and powerful men invariably make enemies; Franklin made his share, no more and no less. Moreover, he balanced the scale with the many devoted friends that he accumulated and kept with such ease. But how he made his share of enemies warrants a little more attention.

A few roused Franklin's ire by defeating his plans, frustrating his hard work, and escaping his control. Here Thomas Penn was conspicuous, consistently outmaneuvering Franklin in London politics. That Penn was arrogant, callous, and insulting rubbed salt in Franklin's wounds. Not accustomed to losing, Franklin lashed out with intemperate rage, in stark contrast to the studied moderation that he usually practiced. After 1775, Franklin lavished similar anger upon his own son William, treating his loyalty to the empire as a personal betrayal. Despite having defied his own father, Franklin asserted patriarchal prerogative to demand that his son defer to his politics. As he pointedly instructed his son, "There are natural duties which precede political ones, and cannot be extinguished by them." When William refused to obey, Franklin wrote his son off with a complete and stony rejection, and did nothing when the rebels arrested and imprisoned him. Instead Franklin took in William's son William Temple Franklin, and taught him to despise his father and Britain. After the war, he rebuffed William's earnest attempts at family reconciliation.

But most of Franklin's enemies were former allies who concluded that he was a bit too clever, sly, flexible, and manipulative. The Philadelphia lawyer John Webbe was typical. In 1740 Franklin approached Webbe to become his partner in a new magazine. Webbe declined, preferring to deal with Franklin's competitor Andrew Bradford. When Franklin insinuated that Webbe had stolen his idea, the lawyer bitterly responded that Franklin practiced "the most mischievous kind of lying; for the strokes being oblique and indirect, a man cannot so easily defend himself against them." Brands acknowledges that "Webbe's complaint presaged many Franklin would hear in the future about his style of attack."

Indeed, Franklin took a special pride in masking his plans and hiding his true feelings. In *Poor Richard's Almanac* he advised: "Let all Men know thee, but no man know thee thoroughly; men freely ford that see the shallows." Franklin meant to ford, never to be forded. He studied personalities closely and applied charm, flattery, and deference to cultivate allies and to disarm critics. He readily

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shared credit and even deflected it—so long as he achieved his goal. Flexible in tactics and allies, Franklin moved indirectly toward his objectives, which offended more forthright colleagues. John Adams was not alone in wondering if Franklin held any principle dearer than self-gratification.

In a place and a time that celebrated sincerity while practicing insincerity, Franklin seemed far too accomplished at the latter. Arthur Lee characterized him as a "false friend." Owing to his smooth manner and shifting tactics, Franklin invited suspicions far beyond his actual intent to trick. Even when he was frank and honest—especially when he was frank and honest—he aroused the distrust of rivals and colleagues certain that he must be up to something especially devious. In 1771, Lee insisted that Franklin was subservient to Lord Hillsborough as either his "dupe" or his willing "instrument." Considering further, Lee concluded that Franklin could be only an instrument, never a dupe: "notorious as [Hillsborough] is for ill faith and fraud, his duplicity would not impose on one possessed of half Dr. F[ranklin]'s sagacity." In sum, Franklin paid a price for being so conspicuously clever—and for trying, sometimes, to mask it.

It attests to the force of Franklin's personality that today, more than two centuries after his death, his charm still takes captives. Dazzled by Franklin's gifts and usual good humor, H.W. Brands cannot bring himself to analyze his subject's darker moments, though he is honest enough to mention them. After reviewing Franklin's clever diplomacy with France and Britain, Brands hastily adds that "his was not a personality that reveled in intrigue and artful maneuvering." If not, he certainly fooled his contemporaries. ■

The Iron and the Magnet

By P. N. FURBANK

A Life of James Boswell by Peter Martin

(Yale University Press, 636 pp., $35)

JAMES BOSWELL, THE biographer of Samuel Johnson, seems to involve one in extremes; and I am inclined to think that it was he, the future author of the greatest of biographies, who inspired or helped inspire Rousseau to write the greatest of all *Confessions*. In the early days of December 1764, the youthful Boswell, who was on the Grand Tour, arrived in the village of Môtiers, Rousseau's place of exile, and sent him a letter. In it he described himself as "a man of singular merit," and he begged for a meeting with the great man: "Open your door, then, Sir, to a man who dares tell you that he deserves to enter it."

Rousseau was ill and in pain, but the letter intrigued him, and so, even more, when he granted him a brief meeting, did Boswell himself. He had met nothing quite like Boswell's overpowering good humor and effrontery. He was soon teasing him; and Boswell, with an extraordinary mixture of reverence and familiarity, was soon shaking his hand and thumping him on the shoulder.

There were further meetings. It was Boswell's plan to make Rousseau his mentor, and to put all the problems of his life before him. Finding that Rousseau was shrewdly evading this, he tried what could be done by writing a "Sketch of his Early Life"—in which, he wrote, "I shall not conceal my weaknesses and follies. I shall not even conceal my crimes." The move was a success, and brought on the exchanges on more solemn topics that he was looking for. Boswell told Rousseau of his longing for respect. Later Rousseau gave his dog Sultan some food on a trencher and, singing him "a lively air with a sweet voice and great taste, made the dog dance round it." He stroked and fed the dog, saying, "with an arch air, 'He is not much respected, but he gets well looked after.'" This charmingly devised dig at Boswell shows the extent of their rapport.

Boswell's genius was for persuading people, even strangers, that his was the voice of that friendly Self with whom they were silently conversing half the day. Only a few days after Boswell left, Rousseau received a shattering blow to his self-love, in the shape of an anonymous attack on him by Voltaire, called *Le Sentiment des citoyens*, which revealed the story of his abandoned children and other scandals in his private life. During the previous months he had begun to sketch a confessional memoir, but judging from its "preamble" it was still somewhat in the edifying mode of the classic moralists. Voltaire's attack made the writing of such a book more urgent; but it also, perhaps, caused him to alter its tone, and to give it the calm shamelessness which is its greatness. He may have had a model near to hand from the pen of his recent English visitor. Boswell never quite managed to look friendlily on his own faults and crimes, but his "Sketch" and his gift for instant intimacy could well have helped Rousseau to do so.

PETER MARTIN'S NEW biography of Boswell is skillfully done, well informed, and well organized. His prose is workmanlike, with every now and then a nice dryness and irony or an amused noting of the obvious. He has inevitably drawn plentifully on Boswell's journals—indeed, he has made them the spine of his narrative, though supplementing them liberally with letters. His leading theme is Boswell's melancholia, and his recurrent attacks of depression and morbid terrors.

In a sense this is reasonable, for the darker moods certainly played an enormous part in Boswell's life, from boyhood onwards. Martin sees his compulsive whoring as directly related to this melancholia. "The pattern from now on," he writes, referring to the year 1763, when Boswell first came to London, was that "when he was at his most melancholy he became dissolute and unhealthily sexual, taking prostitutes wherever he could get them, with total abandon and even some violence." This carries more conviction, I think, than Frederick Pottle's explanation, in *James Boswell: The Earlier Years* (1966), that Boswell was just highly sexed.

It is instructive to compare Martin's book with Pottle's. As editor-in-chief of Boswell's papers from 1930 or thereabouts, Pottle was dizzied by the discovery of more, and still more, papers. His biography, though it took him a long

P. N. FURBANK's most recent book is *Behalf* (University of Nebraska Press). He is also the author, with W. R. Owens, of *A Critical Bibliography of Daniel Defoe* (Pickering & Chatto).

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time to write, is therefore full of wonderment at its subject, and it teems with theories and interpretations. These are not always very convincing: Pottle loved to stress what Boswell had in common with "us," of the mid-twentieth century—never a very happy formula. But one of his reflections is true and striking. It is that Boswell originally regarded his duty as a biographer as being, simply, to give readers an impression of what life seemed like to Boswell.

This, of course, was what Boswell himself conveyed and dramatized so superbly. But Pottle then had to ask himself: what about how Boswell seemed to others?

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Thomas Rowlandson, Boswell threatened by his publisher, 1786

What about his almost constant power of being agreeable, and his success in inspiring love? There was no Boswell there to record it himself. One is told of his flow of high spirits and good humor, but in purely abstract and unspecific terms. The few more detailed pictures of his manners were written by malicious observers such as Frances Burney's beady-eyed sisters.

Yet this was the man whom Samuel Johnson loved and told him that he did, the man to whom friends such as Temple "Grange" Johnston and later Edmond Malone remained most warmly loyal. Peter Martin brings out how devotedly Malone helped Boswell in the writing of the *Life of Johnson*, to the detriment of his own work on Shakespeare. Boswell himself seems to have got little pleasure out of the writing, but Malone's remarks at the time of his death say much: "I shall miss him more and more every day. He was in the constant habit of calling upon me almost daily, and I used to grumble sometimes at his turbulence, but now miss and regret his hilarity and his perpetual good humour, which had no bounds."

There was, in fact, relatively little real acrimony in Boswell's life. He was not a man to bear malice, or to nurse schemes of revenge. He sparred continually with his father, but it never came to a permanent rift; and even his wife Margaret, though she often berated him furiously, as she had every reason to do, bowed her head at the impossibility of changing him.

We need to think ourselves into the purposes of Boswell's *Journals*. Here he is, in the winter of 1762–1763.

> Upon my word, my journal goes charmingly at present.... How easily and cleverly do I write just now! I am really pleased with myself; words come skipping to me like lambs upon Moffat Hill, and I turn my periods smoothly and imperceptibly, like a skilful wheelwright turning tops in a turning-loom. There's fancy! There's simile! In short I am at present a genius.

It is superlative writing, but we must also notice that Boswell is, at least to some degree, mocking himself. In sum: one must not think there is anything definitive in his account of himself. Malone and Johnston, had they come to write his biography, might have drawn a very different picture from the one given by Pottle and Martin.

SO HOW SHALL we categorize Boswell? He was not a social climber, nor a sycophant, nor—as those unsympathetic to him liked to imply—a parasite: certainly not someone who, like Diderot's *neveu de Rameau*, considered a genius for parasitism the next best thing to the more orthodox and laurel-crowned kind. Like the genus ostrich, which contains only one species, we must allow Boswell to be unique. If we are to believe Carlyle, and I think we may, Boswell's relationship with Johnson was unique also.

> You may surround the iron and the magnet with what enclosures and encumbrances you please,—with wood, with rubbish, with brass: it matters not, the two feel each other, they struggle restlessly towards the end of each other, they *will* be together. The iron may be a Scottish squirelet, full of gulosity and "gigmanity"; the magnet an English plebeian, and moving rag-and-dust mountain, coarse, proud, irascible, imperious: nevertheless, behold how they embrace, and inseparably cleave to one another.

As for his book, it was unique in another manner. For often it was Boswell who caused to happen the scenes and the dramas that he would later describe. This might be at his own expense, and he would receive a painful mauling; but he had created a new art form, and one in which nobody has quite managed to follow him.

Peter Martin sets out the paradoxes in Boswell's nature fairly and clearly, but his excellent book is a little short on—what shall we say?—gusto or enthusiasm or wonderment. Let me add that Martin's pages give us plenty of "2 January" and "23 April" but almost never specify the year. This is perfectly all right for someone reading his narrative through from beginning to end, but it ignores the fact that a biography—unlike a poem, or even an autobiography—is a utilitarian object and must be used for all sorts of different purposes. Someone wanting merely to consult Martin's book is liable to get into a rage. ■

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BERLIN DIARIST

German Question

DIVIDED CITIES ARE EXpressions of mechanical ingenuity in a tight spot. But such cities devour themselves. Jerusalem ravaged itself during the 19 years (1948–1967) when half of it was ruled by Jordan and half by Israel. And only Yasir Arafat's avarice for more saved Jerusalem from this awful fate again when he rejected Bill Clinton and Ehud Barak's efforts to split the city last summer.

BERLIN'S FATE WAS JUST AS UNHAPPY. For more than 40 years, West Berlin was a cul-de-sac deep in the heart of East Germany. Split in two by the monstrous wall, the city was not only physically divided but culturally rent, politically in conflict, and psychologically dissonant. It was here that the encounter between communism and democracy was most palpable and most laden. And since the western part, made up of the postwar British, French, and American occupation zones, was virtually surrounded by a dreary and cruel dictatorship, it felt like a doomed anticipation of Europe's ultimate fate. There was a time, thankfully hard to remember now, when even democrats feared that communism was "the arc of the future." But, in 1989, quite unpredictably, the wall came down and with it the regime that had built it to imprison not only people's bodies but also their souls.

THE BODIES ARE NOW FREE, BUT THE souls have proved trickier. Some of the young men and women of the former German Democratic Republic—having been schooled in the dogmas of communism—turned out to hunger not for tolerance and freedom but for violence and hatred. When the hammers and sickles were whitewashed they were replaced, with disturbing frequency, by swastikas.

ALL THIS IS ON MY MIND BECAUSE I am attending a conference in Berlin, the sixteenth German-Jewish Dialogue, convened by the British publisher Lord Weidenfeld and an executive board member of the Bertelsmann Stiftung (the publishing giant's foundation), Professor Werner Weidenfeld (no relation). We've been talking about anti-Semitism in Germany, the Palestinian intifada, Israel's relations with Europe, and the strains between the old ideal of ethnic homogeneity and the new reality of cultural heterogeneity in a united Germany. These are different topics, of course, but they touch on each other. They were brought together most deliberately by Joschka Fischer, the foreign minister of the Federal Republic and arguably the highest-ranking Green in any government in the world—by any standard, a most interesting and complex human being.

IN RECENT WEEKS, FISCHER'S PAST has come back to haunt him. There is a newly discovered photograph of him beating a policeman during a riot in the early '70s—when Fischer wasn't a Green but a Red. Then there is the fresh evidence of Fischer's attendance at a PLO conference in Algiers in 1969, at a time when Yasir Arafat made no pretense of not being a terrorist. Finally, the foreign minister has been a character witness in the trial of an old comrade in the failed revolution, like Adlai Stevenson for Alger Hiss. Some people think Fischer will not be foreign minister long. But they may be wrong. In any case, he spoke provocatively. Some highlights: Germany, he said, "is defined by the conflict between the nation and the European." And he did not disguise his preference for Europe. The contemporary German political tradition, he maintained, descends "from English common law, the French Revolution, and the American Constitution." And "Israel is the cornerstone of German foreign policy." For a moment I thought I understood, even admired, the man. And then he defended the ever-closer relationship between Germany and Iran, the human rights of the Iranian people be damned.

WHAT FUELS GERMANY'S NEW RIGHT is the presence of around seven million aliens—some *Gastarbeiter*, or guest workers, some legal immigrants, some asylum seekers. There are more than 2.2 million Turks in Germany now, many of them Kurds. There are refugees from Afghanistan and Algeria, the cruelest corners of the Muslim world—and Germany's violent skinheads perpetuate their misery. Germany's Greeks, Spaniards, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Russians, and Gypsies get off easier. But they add to the numbers. Every year, in fact, nearly 70,000 "foreigners" are born in Germany. But, of course, these foreigners stay. This frightens many ordinary Germans who fear that their national ways are being displaced, that their culture is being undermined as a result of their prosperity. Fifty years ago, ordinary Germans turned on the Jews who had lived among them for centuries. Today, many are turning on the foreigners from the south and east who came recently. Are these new outsiders less familiar with, maybe even less sympathetic to, German culture than the old outsiders? Perhaps. But surely persecuting them doesn't solve that problem; it compounds it.

THE JEWS ARE STILL HERE IN MEMory; Berlin is haunted by them. The city of Christopher Isherwood's edgy *Berlin Stories* can be updated and restored. But, despite the new Jews of Berlin, the Jewish Berlin that was snuffed out during the Nazi years cannot be restored. The past will be represented only by museums and places of commemoration. The Jewish Museum, designed by the American architect Daniel Liebeskind, is still empty. But its jagged edges and startling angularities already tell the story of German Jewry. A controversial memorial on a large tract in the center of town, designed by another American architect, Peter Eisenman, will also evoke the enormous, lost presence. Prayers are once again said in the great synagogue destroyed on *Kristallnacht* in 1938. But the vastness of the place is taunted by the small congregation. And Jewish history is even evoked in venues not specifically associated with Jews. The Reichstag, for example, famously wrapped by Christo, is now dominated by a great glass dome, as if its British architect, Norman Foster, believes that the material will magnify for all time the terrible tale of what happened there.

BUT BERLIN, NEEDLESS TO SAY, IS not just about Nazism or about Jews. It is a living city with stunning parks and good food (none of it German). It is also a center of culture, most especially of music, art, and antiquities. The Pergamon Museum is one of those places that remind you of the virtues of imperialism. The Greek altar that is its center would probably long ago have been dissipated had it not been transported to Germany.

IT'S ALMOST POSSIBLE TO FORGET HISory in Germany's current accumulated splendor. But then you see a trace of the Allied bombings. Or the nasty aesthetic of the Communist regime, brutish and regulated, a visual metaphor for life under the second of the tyrannies that have so distorted German history. In a way, Berlin is still divided—not just between east and west, but between past and future, civilization and its discontents—both of which this epic city has nurtured so well.

MARTIN PERETZ

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